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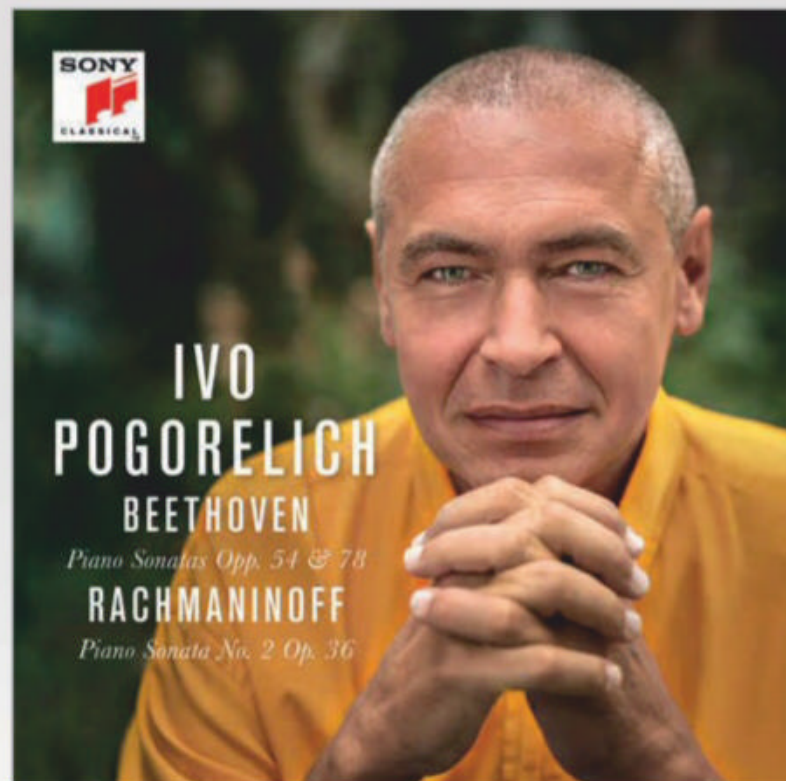
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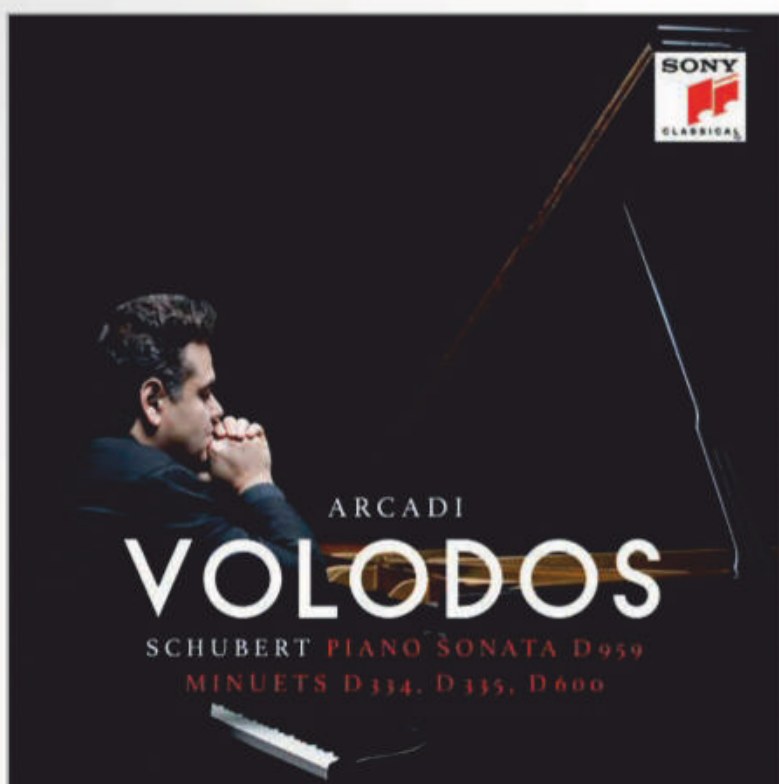
Beethoven: Complete Piano Sonatas



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Ivo Pogorelich

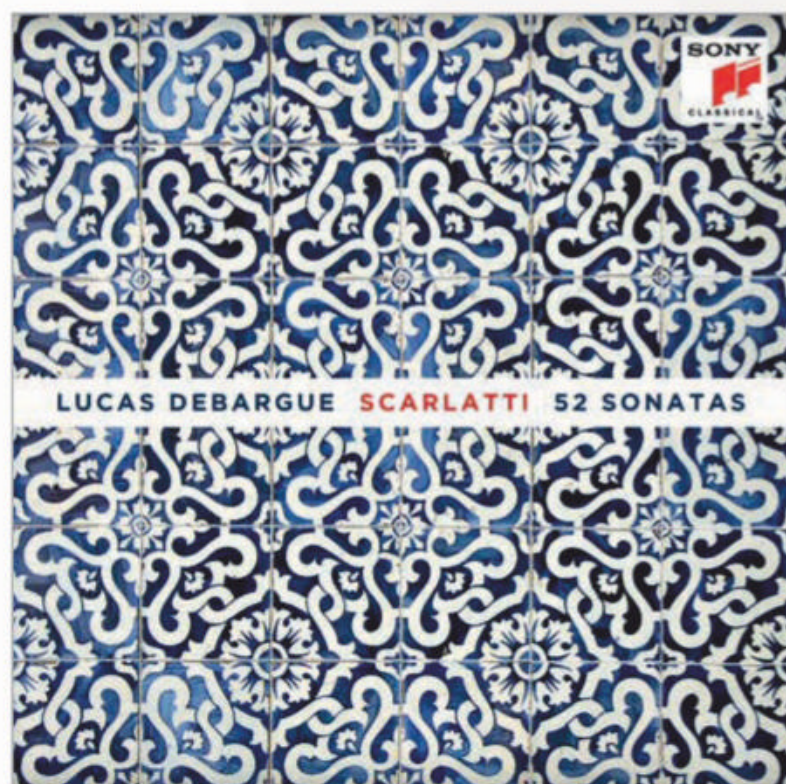
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GRAMOPHONE

ISOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Deak

BB Wolf (An Apologia)^a. Bye-Bye!^b. The Legend of Spuyten Duyvil^c. The Snow Queen Finale: The Ice Palace^d

^bJulia Bogorad-Kogan fl/narr ^cChris Gekker tpt

^dPamela Goldsmith va ^aJohn Deak db/narr

^aJudith Lynn Stillman pf/narr ^{cd}Cabrillo

Festival Orchestra / Marin Alsop narr

Naxos American Classics © 8 559785 (53' • DDD)

Recorded live at ^{cd}Cabrillo Festival Hall, Santa Cruz, CA, July 31 & August 1, 1993; ^{ab}820 West End Ave, New York, December 15, 1998



Narrators, like humour, are notoriously difficult to integrate into musical

works. For every successful endeavour – Schoenberg rather had the knack, as in *Gurrelieder*, *A Survivor from Warsaw* and the *Ode to Napoleon* – the failures are legion. Works such as Britten's *Young Person's Guide* and Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* don't really count as the narration is not really integrated into the scores and can be omitted.

Jon Deak (b1943), former double-bassist with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, is a composer who has clearly embraced the genre, as this unusual and enterprising release from Naxos reveals. The four works featured here date from 1982 – *BB Wolf* – to 1991, when *The Snow Queen Finale* and *The Legend of Spuyten Duyvil* were composed. The formats are very different, *BB Wolf (An Apologia)* scored for Deak to declaim while playing the bass unaccompanied, *Bye-Bye!* (1987) a more complex 'tribute to the immigrants of America' for flute and piano, where both players double as speakers, and the two orchestral works where conductor Marin Alsop also narrates.

Each piece works quite well – Deak is an efficient and accomplished composer – though it strikes me that in each case the impact of the music is greater for being seen and heard live. There is an immediacy to the writing that does not fully translate on disc, especially in his apology for the perhaps not-so-villainous wolf, *BB Wolf*,

where seeing Deak perform this live would be more compelling. To varying degrees the same applies to the other pieces, which employ instrumental and vocal effects that are better seen as well as heard. The expressive targets are not always comedic: *The Legend of Spuyten Duyvil* is a tragic tale and *The Snow Queen Finale* is emotively ambiguous. The performances are all well executed and well recorded. **Guy Rickards**

K Smith

The Arc in the Sky

The Crossing / Donald Nally

Navona © NV6240 (66' • DDD • T)



Kile Smith describes his *The Arc in the Sky* as a '65-minute pilgrimage for unaccompanied choir', and, he might have added, for listeners. Smith's series of nine musical meditations based on selected, painfully vulnerable poems by Robert Lax climaxes in the final track, 'The Arc', which for 12 minutes focuses and refocuses on two five-word phrases – 'the arc in the sky/the arc of the sea' – not melodramatically but in abstract sequences without pattern that engage listeners as observers who play a role in what is being received, like the physicists at CERN.

The weight of Lax's influence and of the philosopher Thomas Merton, who believed that poetry could serve as a primary means of communication not so much with the outer world but with the soul, is reflected in Kile's choices; he prefers first to adumbrate and then to discover. His identification with the poet's voice is complete, meaning disappears, and then light breaks through and you realise you have been understanding the meaning all the time.

There is a subtle variety in the way Smith pursues these messages. 'Psalm' is passionate, dissonant at 'I believed myself'; it finds relief in the radiance of 'Jerusalem'. 'I would stand and watch them' wanders along more disquieting paths, features

solo voices, risks more silence, before it leads into 'The Arc', which is to say the beginning.

The sound of Donald Nally's *The Crossing*, recorded at St Peter's Church in Malvern, Pennsylvania, applies a grainy black-on-grey patina over the concurrent arcs of their sensitive, responsive performances. **Laurence Vittes**

Zink

'The Cloud of Unknowing:

Explorations in Chamber Music'

Afterglow^a. Cipher^b. The Cloud of Unknowing^b.

On the Boundary^a. Remembered Things^a.

String Quartet^b. String Quintet^b

Alexis Castrogiovanni vc with ^bErik Johnson-Scherger, ^bAvery Morris vns ^bRenée Dahl va

^bJoshua Bullen db ^aAbigail Sánchez pf

Azédarac Music © 061297 642700 (50' • DDD)



The title of this disc of chamber music for strings by Canadian-born Steve Zink, 'The Cloud of Unknowing', is curiously (and, I suspect, unintentionally) apt. Azédarac's disc is remarkably uninformative aside from composition names and who plays what. The only dates are copyright ones. (2018: were they all written then? The composer's website is just as unhelpful.) There is no hint of any piece's inspiration or expressive aims, just a blandly grand statement that his intention is to 'facilitate encounter with that depth dimension that operates ... beyond good and evil. The aim here is not symbolization but incantation.' For a disc subtitled 'Explorations in Chamber Music' – what, where is he exploring? – this is curiously uncommunicative, the listener's enforced 'unknowing' rather self-defeating, as if discovering new territory only in the unlit dark.

Were the music more interesting this might not matter. The opening half of the programme contains three songs without words for cello and piano – performed very nicely by Alexis Castrogiovanni (who plays throughout) and accompanist Abigail Sánchez – punctuated by two brief quintets,

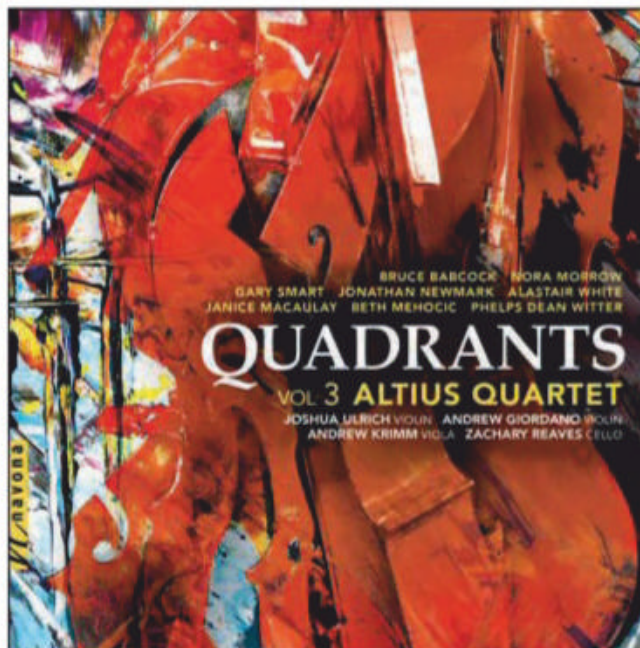


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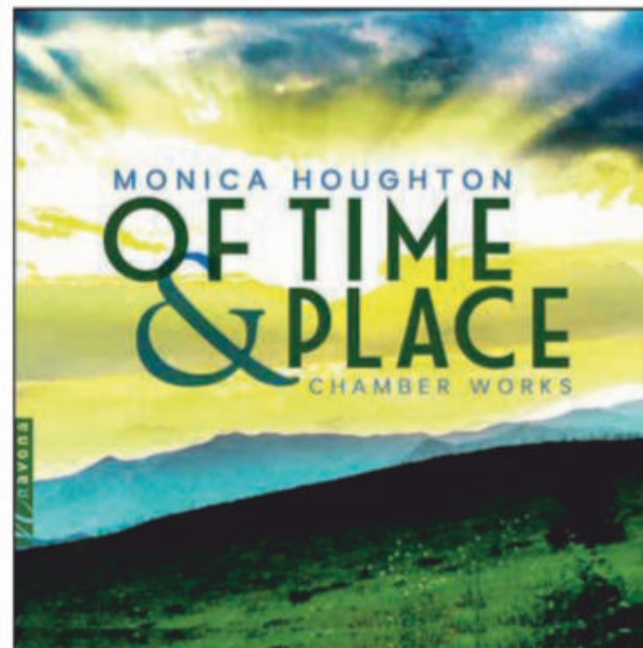
QUADRANTS VOL. 3 PHELPS DEAN WITTER

The series that brought both traditional and genre-defying collections of string quartet continues with Navona Records' **QUADRANTS VOL. 3**, featuring **Altius Quartet**. **QUADRANTS VOL. 3** concludes with **Phelps Dean Witter's** *String Quartet No. 4*, a piece filled with building emotion that is simultaneously traditional and innovative.

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OF TIME & PLACE MONICA HOUGHTON

Composer **Monica Houghton** cites ancient poetry, the beauty of nature, Tibetan Buddhist paintings, and the music of Beethoven as her inspiration. Performed by solo artists, duets and trios, and chamber ensemble, the eight pieces on **OF TIME & PLACE** bring to light the depth and breadth of her passions and experiences.

NAVONA RECORDS (NV6162)

monicahoughton.com

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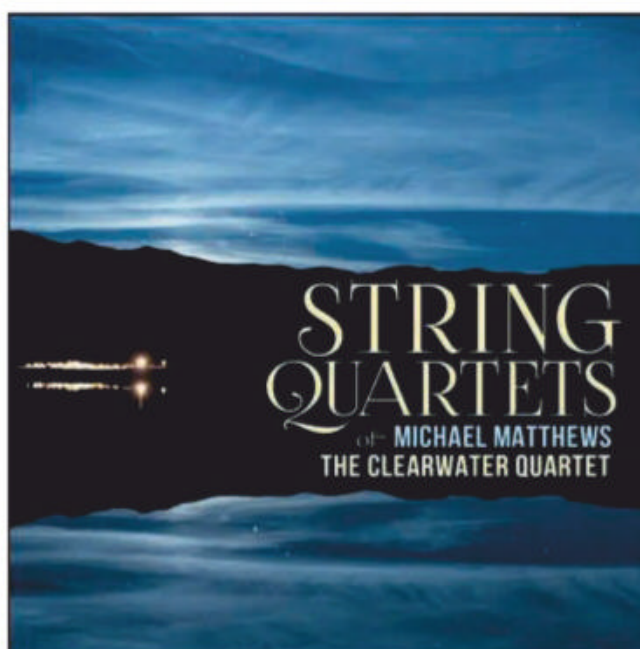
GUERNICA PIANO CONCERTO FREDRICK KAUFMAN

Fredrick Kaufman's Navona Records album **GUERNICA**, featuring pianist **Kemal Gekić**, presents a compelling response to war and violence. Drawing inspiration from *Guernica*, Pablo Picasso's anti-war painting, for his concerto, Kaufman stated that "the time is right... for an anti-war composition that not only depicts the horrors of war, but cries out for peace, love, and a positive approach to life in the future."

NAVONA RECORDS (NV5924)

www.fredrickkaufman.com

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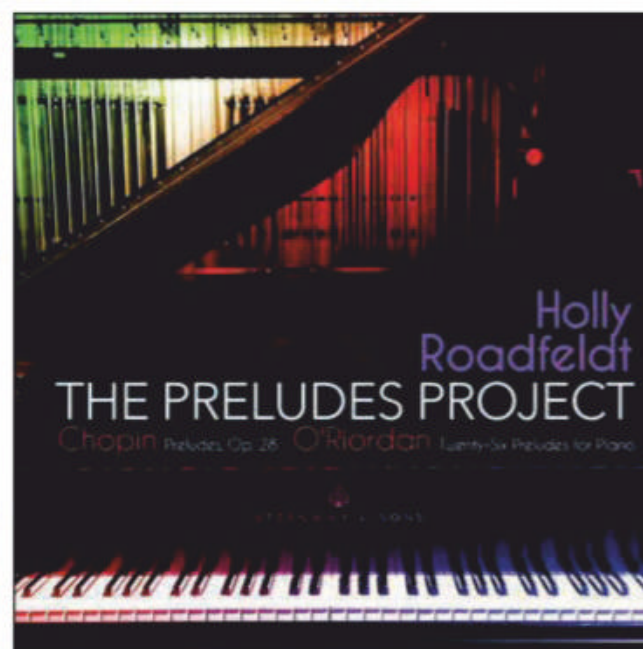
STRING QUARTETS MICHAEL MATTHEWS

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A 65-minute pilgrimage for unaccompanied choir: The Crossing make a strong case for Kile Smith's *The Arc in the Sky* – see review on page 1

Cipher and the title-track. They are all pleasant background music in an anonymous, minimalist-like manner. None really goes anywhere and all say rather less.

None of the performers sound taxed by the music's technical demands, nor energised particularly, either. The String Quintet strikes me as the most grateful to perform (and listen to) if only because it is of sufficient length – 20 minutes – for everyone to get really involved in it. Its swift opening movement is rather catchy, the overlong slower central span (Zink merely numbers the movements, leaving no clues for the audience) nicely lyrical. The finale balances the whole well. The Quartet, although in four movements, is rather slighter, each movement expiring without really reaching a conclusion and leaving this listener at any rate feeling unsatisfied. **Guy Rickards**

'Clarinet Classics at Riversdale'

Baermann Clarinet Quintet No 3, Op 23 - Adagio
Glazunov *Rêverie orientale* **Koch** Monolog 3
W Osborne *Rhapsody* **Rózsa** Sonatina, Op 27
Weber Clarinet Quintet, Op 34
Robert DiLutis *cl Mellifera Quartet*
 Delos © DE3561 (60' • DDD)



Sometimes, not as often as I would like, one listens to a new disc and knows from the very first phrase that it is a winner. This superbly performed programme is one such, a joy to listen to, neatly arranged, mixing the familiar with the less so, alternating ensemble works for all five players with solo works for Robert DiLutis to showcase his wonderfully warm tone and virtuoso technique.

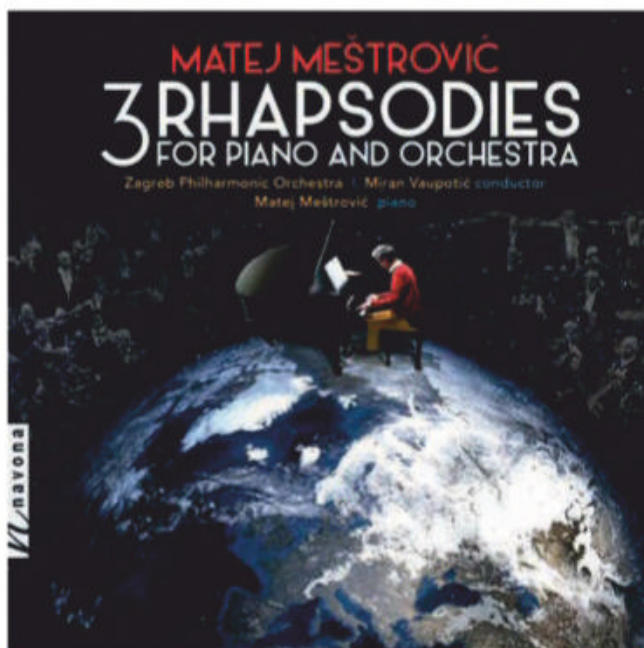
Weber's Clarinet Quintet (1811-15) is the major item, described aptly by DiLutis in his booklet essay as 'for clarinetists a dream come true' – confirmed by the dozens of recordings currently available. While the present couplings for it are unique (Weber's concertos or the Mozart Quintet are more usual), this recording is definitely competitive, beautifully played by DiLutis and accompanied in exemplary fashion by the Mellifera Quartet. Weber composed it for Heinrich Baermann, a gifted – if minor – composer in his own right, represented here by the wistful *Adagio* from his Third Quintet. It is a shame the entire work could not be

included, though this movement enjoys a separate existence. The final ensemble piece is Glazunov's *Rêverie orientale* (1886), a lovely inspiration which is confused in the track-listing with the later – and much shorter – *Rêverie* for horn, Op 24 (1890).

The three unaccompanied pieces are every bit as rewarding. Rózsa's Sonatina, Op 27 (1951), is a hugely involving diptych comprising a theme and variations followed by a gypsy dance, the whole oozing Hungarian atmosphere. Erland von Koch's *Monolog 3* (1973), the third of a series of 17 for different instruments, is another diptych, cooler in temperature but no less passionate. The *Rhapsody* (1952) by William Osborne (1906-79) is a real find, based on an old Asian melody (a touch after Hovhaness's manner) and also exists in a version for bassoon. **Guy Rickards**

'Quadrants, Vol 3'

Babcock The Present Moment **Macaulay** Three Pieces **Mehocic** Picasso's Flight **Morrow** Rose Moon **Newmark** Tom Dooley without the Fringe on Top **Smart** Three Fantasies on African American Songs **A White** Two Panels **Witter** String Quartet No 4
Altius Quartet
 Navona © NV6239 (77' • DDD)



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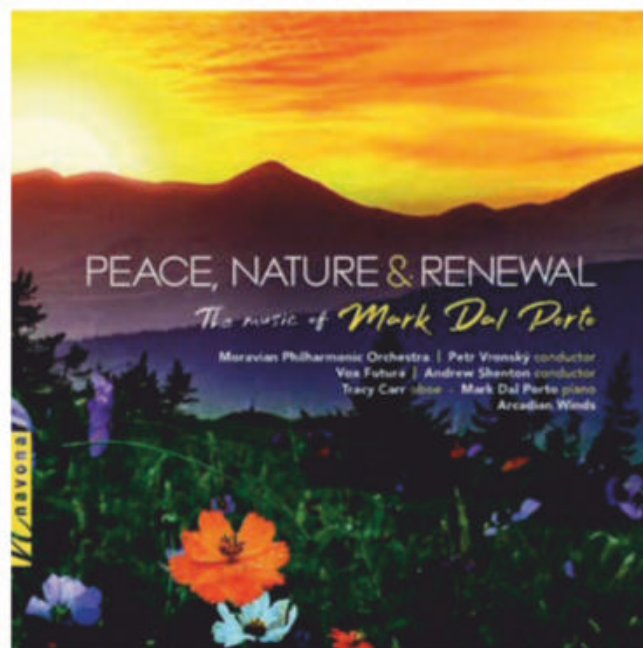
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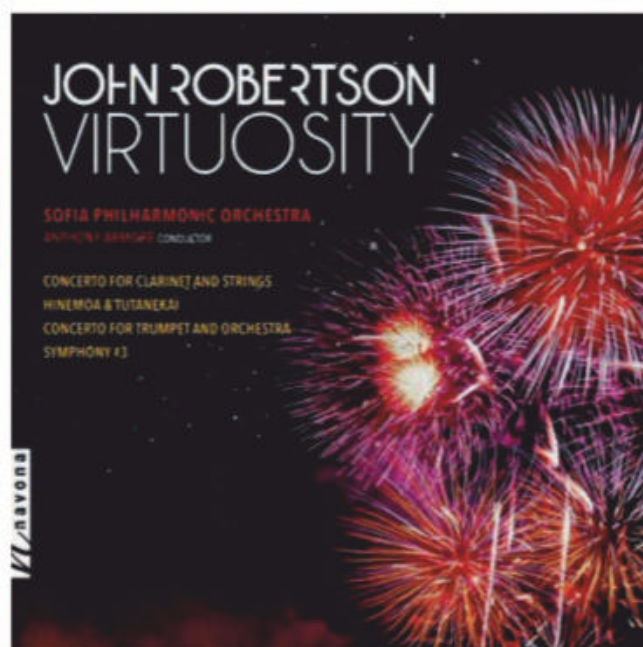
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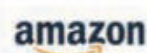
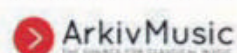
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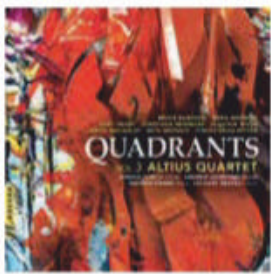


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The third volume in Navona's enterprising 'Quadrants'

recordings of new music for string quartet gives voice to an intriguingly conservative range of contemporary currents in American music, touched at times by earlier classical traditions, in committed performances by the Altius Quartet, based in Boulder, Colorado.

Despite stylistic differences, the music overall captures a rational sensibility that at times makes it seem as if AI

composing machines were at work. Yet there are human touches throughout, as in the absorbing String Quartet No 4 by Phelps Dean Witter, which the composer came up with on his way to the grocery store and which in its last movement hearkens back to Wolf's *Italian Serenade*.

On the way to Witter from Bruce Babcock's affecting, retro-Beethovenish *The Present Moment*, the Altius encounter Nora Morrow's endearing *Rose Moon*, named after the composer's mother, in the form of three homespun dialogues filled with lovely lyrical things for the four players to do, especially the cello. Gary Smart's *Three Fantasies on African American*

Songs takes a different, more biting tack, finishing with a ghostly, skating take on 'Shortening Bread'.

Written as a speedwriting exercise, Jonathan Newmark's *Tom Dooley without the Fringe on Top* channels the energy and rhythms of Bartók's Fifth Quartet. Alastair White's *Two Panels* is a passionately atonal essay about time. Janice Macaulay's *Three Pieces* creates an arresting playground of sounds and effects. Beth Mehocic's *Picasso's Flight* recounts the failed efforts of the composer's pet parrot to fly.

Recorded at the University of Colorado's Grusin Hall, the sound is precise and clear. **Laurence Vittes**

Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Nashville

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 2006

Architect David M Schwarz

Capacity Laura Turner Concert Hall: 1844 seats

Resident ensemble Nashville Symphony

The Schermerhorn Symphony Center opened in 2006 as the centrepiece of the Nashville Symphony's new strategic plan. Named for longtime music director Kenneth Schermerhorn, the performance space was designed with one primary objective in mind – acoustics. In the words of Symphony President Alan Valentine, 'the orchestra needed a great place to play, because all we have to sell is sound'. Prior to the opening of the Schermerhorn, the Nashville Symphony's concerts were presented at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center – a large venue with acoustics that did little to transmit the true ability of the orchestra to its patrons. The Symphony's progress demanded a hall that could match its musicality, and the project development team delivered with a rare trifecta of large-scale construction – to specification, on time and on budget.

Inspired by the features of Europe's finest concert halls, Nashville selected a 'shoebox' design intended to maximise sound quality. The narrow floorplan and tall ceiling create a clear but warm acoustic character for the hall, and at under 1900 seats its intimate size allows audiences to experience the full range of the Symphony's expression. Natural light created by 30 soundproofed windows, a 64-rank Schoenstein organ and iconography linking the Schermerhorn to the region give the space its own personality, but its sound quality is still the most impressive feature.

Located just blocks from the city's replica of the Athenian Parthenon, the Schermerhorn's neoclassical exterior mirrors Nashville's historical aesthetic. But like the city itself, the Schermerhorn carefully balances a nod towards tradition with an embrace of the modern. The Laura Turner Concert Hall is equipped with a motorised system capable of quickly transforming the raked orchestral seating into a hardwood ballroom floor and a series of automated panels allowing the space to be acoustically tuned for a variety of concert experiences – attractive features for



a venue that is proud to welcome a true spectrum of artists, from John Prine to John Adams.

Since its inaugural concert under the baton of Leonard Slatkin in 2006, the Schermerhorn Symphony Center has been one of the focal points of a resurgent downtown scene fuelling Nashville's growing popularity. But a mere four years after it opened, the Schermerhorn suffered a significant setback during Nashville's 2010 flood. Swollen by record-breaking rain, the Cumberland River inundated the hall with 27 feet of black water, resulting in \$40 million of damage. Paired with a sluggish economic recovery after the 2008 recession, this damage could have spelt disaster for the Symphony and its new venue. President Alan Valentine instead describes the challenge as 'the symphony's greatest hour', saying of the city and its musicians, 'this is a community that has no idea what it can't accomplish'. Music City embraced its Symphony and its new hall, and rolled up its sleeves. Within eight months, the Schermerhorn reopened with a New Year's Eve concert featuring the violinist Itzhak Perlman. The waiting list for tickets was eight pages long. **Brad Baumgardner**

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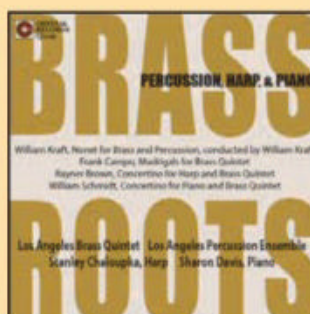
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CD515: CERNINARO PLAYS MOZART Four Horn Concertos. Gerard Schwarz conducting the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. **"hallmarks of this recording are refinement, nuance, and Cerninaro's very dark tone quality."** American Record Guide.

CD676: BEETHOVEN, HINDEMITH, & BERNHARD HEIDEN HORN SONATAS. Also Bozza, F. Strauss, Glazunov, Faure, Gliere, Schmid.

"Cerninaro was the best solo horn the New York Philharmonic has had since World War II." American Record Guide.

CD679: SCREAMERS: Difficult Works for Horn. Schumann, Adagio and Allegro; Joseph Haydn, Divertimento a tre; William Kraft, Evening Voluntaries; Rand Steiger, A New-Slain Knight; Henri Lazarof, Intrada.



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A LETTER FROM *Montreal*

Arthur Kaptainis offers a personal round-up of the musical life of a city enriched by its linguistic duality



Montreal can be spelt with or without an *accent aigu*, an option that partly explains the abundance of music in this city. Where one symphony orchestra, new-music collective, Baroque band or chamber society would do for most North American towns of about two million people (depending on where you draw the urban boundaries), Montreal offers two or more. And while memories of the origin of these divisions are receding, French and English speakers (the latter now distinctly in the minority) can enjoy in the 21st century the fruits of the linguistic duality of the 20th.

The largesse is apparent in the Maison Symphonique, the sleek concert hall that opened in 2011. The Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, led by Kent Nagano, has something like official residency but there is room also for the Orchestre Métropolitain, still under the artistic direction of Montreal-born Yannick Nézet-Séguin, whose exploits beyond the city limits are well known.

Organised in the 1980s as a sanctuary for Montreal Conservatoire graduates who regarded the OSM as inaccessible, this orchestra

now plays at a level that invites comparison with more established ensembles. Front offices do not talk much, which can lead to performances within 10 days of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony (November 16 and 17 by Nézet-Séguin, who then takes it on a North American tour, and November 27 and 28 by Nagano). In few other cities on this side of the Atlantic are two rival orchestras led by conductors of comparable international repute.

Will this continue to be the case? The 2019-20 season is Nagano's last as music director. His unpredictable repertoire interests (which resulted in a Beethoven cycle on the Analekta label) have tended to work against the orchestra's former fame on Decca as an exponent of the Franco-Russian showpiece corridor. Still, Nagano was able to restore the OSM-Decca connection with recordings of *L'Aiglon* (4/16), the 1937 opera composed jointly by Honegger and Ibert, and a freshened-up edition of Bernstein's *A Quiet Place* (8/18). He has also proved adept at cementing local support through events like the 2017 celebration of the 375th anniversary of the city that featured the multimedia Symphony No 1, *Concordia*, of Samy Moussa, a fast-rising Berlin composer of Montreal birth to whom Nagano has given important commissions (including a work for violin and orchestra that will be heard in the Bruckner programme with OSM concertmaster Andrew Wan as soloist).

It will not be easy to find a successor who blends Nagano's civic awareness, box-office charisma and international mystique. Rafael Payare and Vasily Petrenko have both claimed in newspaper interviews that they are persons of interest, and musicians speak highly of Alain Altinoglu, Karina Canellakis and François-Xavier Roth. Whoever gets the nod will have to contend

with an increasing emphasis on pop programming. The 2019-


20 season might open officially on September 23 with Nagano conducting Shostakovich's Symphony No 13 but there are three concerts the previous week featuring the chanteuse Diane Dufresne. As for Yannick, he has, incredibly, begun a cycle of Sibelius symphonies with the OM on ATMA Classique (No 1 was reviewed in 8/19), after completing a well-regarded Bruckner cycle on this Montreal label despite his having signed an agreement with Deutsche Grammophon.

Montrealers are, according to tradition, favourably disposed to *l'art lyrique*. Alas, the Opéra de Montréal has been fated since its foundation in 1980 to operate in the Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier of the Place des Arts, the same big, dull auditorium that made Charles Dutoit and the OSM seem less brilliant live than on

recordings made in the parish church of the nearby town of St Eustache. Nevertheless, the company has a loyal enough following to schedule an annual mainstage run of a contemporary work

(this season, George Benjamin's *Written on Skin*) as well as chamber operas in smaller venues.

Not all the music-making in Montreal is writ large. Several new music and early music groups do battle for their respective audiences. The Société de musique contemporaine du Québec (SMCQ) and the Studio de musique ancienne de Montréal (SMAM) are important names. I Musici de Montréal, who made many recordings for Chandos with their founder Yuli Turovsky (1939-2013), compete with the Orchestre Classique de Montréal. These and other ensembles (including the regular visitors from Quebec City, Les Violons du Roy) often perform in Bourgie Hall, a refurbished church linked to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The Arte Musica foundation sponsors concerts in this facility, which is also used by the Montreal Baroque Festival, the Montreal Bach Festival and the Montreal Chamber Music Festival. Pollack Hall remains the home of the 127-year-old Ladies' Morning Musical Club. Pro Musica, a chamber presenter founded in 1948, often uses the midsize Salle Pierre-Mercure.

No musical city is complete without a competition or two. The annual Concours Musical International de Montréal (successively voice, violin, piano) and the triennial Canadian International Organ Competition attract strong fields with big purses. McGill, the Université de Montréal, Concordia University and the Université du Québec à Montréal have music faculties or departments. Add the Conservatoire and you have a formidable musical student body. Some might wonder whether the OSM, post-Nagano, can continue to sustain interest across a wide demographic spectrum, but history teaches us not to underestimate Montreal. Or, for that matter, Montréal. 

In few other cities on this side of the Atlantic are two rival orchestras led by conductors of comparable repute

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Pictured: Violinist Janine Jansen (DECCA / © Marco Borggreve) who featured on the January 2016 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$142.87; print only annual subscription or Digital Edition or Reviews Database (\$101); Digital Club (\$134); Gramophone Club (\$167). If choosing a print option, an addition overseas P+P charge will be added at \$35.75 (Outside EU). If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com

Music can offer a change of perspective

Performers offer us listeners many things – transcendent playing perhaps, or interpretative insight. But some of our most meaningful encounters with musicians happen when they challenge or change our perspective.

Christian Tetzlaff is one of those artists, and his new album of the violin concertos of Beethoven and Sibelius is one of those records. Even the instrument he plays – a new one by Peter Greiner, rather than a vintage violin from by an illustrious luthier of centuries past – encourages us to think differently. As he recently told me, he's not trying to make a statement, he just thinks it's the best-sounding instrument. It's a relatively rare stance. Free-thinking, convention-challenging – it's there in the playing too. Rob Cowan, who reviews the album, and the musicians interviewed by James Jolly in his profile piece, all reach for terms such as 'risk-taking' or 'fearless'. For me, I was struck equally by the playing's strangely present power in the most delicate sections, and by a tone at once both sweet and rugged in the most virtuosic ones. As Rob Cowan characterfully puts it 'he transforms aspects of what so many have treated as a sort of Holy Grail (ie loftily reverential) into a beer tankard'. It makes you hear the work slightly differently. Even the album's conductor agrees: 'He's constantly showing me, teaching me,' says Robin Ticciati. Even when discussing the concertos, Tetzlaff can shift your perspective. He observes that both works come from the beginnings of new centuries and, Janus-like, look both backwards and ahead. We're not far into our own new century, meanwhile, and Tetzlaff's



recording places these historic works vividly into our own moment of searching dialogue between past and future. A thought-provoking perspective indeed.

Challenging children's attitudes to classical music, meanwhile, has always been an important aim. This month the BBC announced it has commissioned a musical adaption of a book by Michael Morpurgo, something its commissioner Jan Younghusband hopes will follow in the footsteps of works such as Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* in igniting those first sparks of passion for classical music. This month's Collection work, Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals*, undoubtedly will have done just that for many (perhaps even you), and continues to do so. Change someone's perspective at that age, and you've changed it for life.

Another musician, one as eloquent with pen as with piano, invites a yet different, complementary perspective. In his newly launched book, Stephen Hough gently encourages us to think differently – or rather perhaps just to *think* – about music and music-making. For while we're of course right to always ponder ageing audiences, I was moved when Hough recalled the humbling sense of privilege he felt seeing an elderly man being wheeled to his seat to hear him play Beethoven. Should the fading days of summer still hold holidays for you, then stowing Hough's *Rough Ideas* in your luggage will offer many such moments.

From Hough, from Tetzlaff, from new works aimed at children, sometimes it's the gentle nudge to see things from a new perspective, which can make all the difference.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Post-concert dressing rooms don't always make ideal interview scenarios,' admits writer

PETER QUANTRILL, 'but Iván Fischer waved away exhaustion and well-wishers to think deeply about the most famous symphony of all. "Beethoven is a prophet," he told me. "He changes people's lives."'



'Hearing Christian Tetzlaff play the Beethoven Violin Concerto live in Berlin was a wonderful experience,' says

JAMES JOLLY, 'so it's good that the recording reflects my memory of it. It was fascinating discussing music-making with him the following morning, and discovering what motivates this remarkable player.'



'It has been highly rewarding to become acquainted with, and exhume, so much of Stanford's quality

music that is still in manuscript', says **JEREMY DIBBLE**. 'Through this feature and many new recordings, I hope that he'll be appreciated as the master of many idioms beyond his celebrated church music.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepilova • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Edward Seckerson • Mark Seow • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

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ALESSANDRO TAMPIERI

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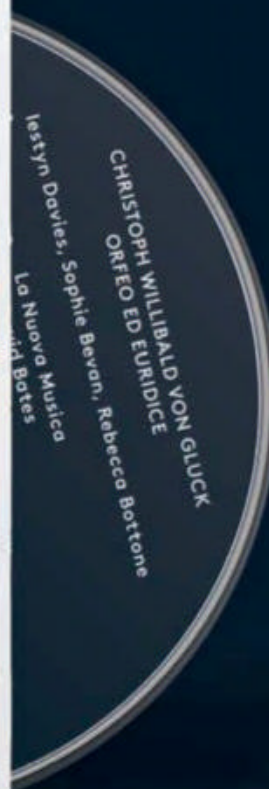
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

Noble Simplicity and Calm Grandeur

La Nuova Musica and its artistic director David Bates present a new live recording of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, with three exceptional vocalists: countertenor Iestyn Davies and sopranos Sophie Bevan and Rebecca Bottone. Once created to reinstate the "noble simplicity and calm grandeur" of ancient Greek culture, the opera continues to delight audiences with its direct and unpretentious appeal, epitomized by the world-famous aria *Che farò senza Euridice*.

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ALBUMS!

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PTC 5186 815

Old Souls

Gili Schwarzman, Guy Braunstein
Susanna Yoko Henkel, Amihai Grosz,
Alisa Weilerstein



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Beethoven - Piano Concertos Part 1

Inon Barnatan
Alan Gilbert
Academy of St. Martin in the Fields



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
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



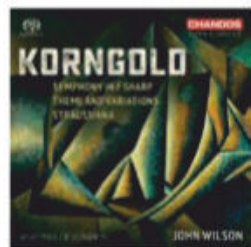
RECORDING OF THE MONTH



BEETHOVEN. SIBELIUS

Violin Concertos
Christian Tetzlaff *vn*
Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Robin Ticciati
Ondine
► **ROB COWAN'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 38**

The engaging, ever-communicative artistry of Christian Tetzlaff led us to focus on him this issue – a quality perfectly demonstrated in these questing, excellent concerto performances.



KORNGOLD

Symphony, etc
Sinfonia of London / John Wilson
Chandos
You can read the story

behind this orchestra in our news pages, but suffice to say this remarkable group of players gathered by John Wilson offer a Korngold Symphony of striking beauty.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**

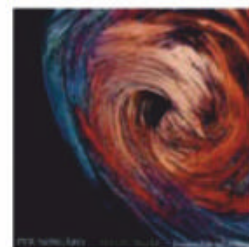


BARTÓK Piano Quintet VERESS String Trio

Vilde Frang *vn* et al
Alpha
This superb collection of artists bring an

almost palpable rapport to these works; youthful Bartók and, perhaps the really intriguing work here, the fascinating String Trio from Sándor Veress.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



NØRGÅRD

Whirl's World
Ensemble MidtVest
Dacapo

Different facets – or rather, perhaps, a broad portrait – of this Danish composer's beguiling music, performed with passion and complete affinity with his sound world by Ensemble MidtVest.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**



'SILK BAROQUE'

Wu Wei *sheng*
Holland Baroque
Pentatone
The sheng, masterfully played by Wu Wei –

the soloist who introduced the Chinese mouth organ to readers in our February issue's Artists & their Instruments – fits movingly into this Baroque programme.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



JS BACH

Organ Works
Masaaki Suzuki *org*
BIS
Masaaki Suzuki's superb new Bach

instalment – on organ, lest you think there are further cantatas on offer here! – is also a gloriously atmospheric demonstration of the Freiberg Cathedral instrument.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 68**



KAPSPERGER

'Intavolatura di chitarone'
Jonas Nordberg *theorbo*
BIS
Jonas Nordberg really relishes the richly

resonant colours of his theorbo throughout this recital of music by the 17th-century composer Kapsperger, dance themes played with delight and a gentle virtuosity.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**



'IBERIA Y FRANCA'

Imogen Cooper *pf*
Chandos
Imogen Cooper's characterful performances lend

a heady and charming air to these works evocatively exploring the links between France and Spain, including music from Albéniz, Debussy and Ravel.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**



MACHAUT

'The Single Rose'
The Orlando Consort
Hyperion
The Orlando Consort's brilliant,

and acclaimed, Machaut series continues. Songs, and indeed poems, over six centuries old, given vivid life by this first-class quartet of singers.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



'KAISER MAXIMILIAN I'

Per-Sonat / Sabine Lutzenberger
Christophorus
A beautifully prepared programme to mark

the 500th anniversary of the death of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I – an elegantly and exquisitely performed insight into an artistic era.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**

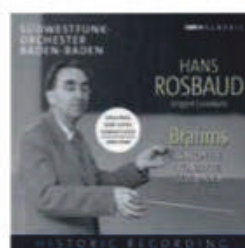


DVD/BLU-RAY

R STRAUSS *Salome*
Sols; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Franz Welser-Möst
Unitel/C Major

'The staging that haunted me most last year', writes MP of this intriguing *Salome*, praising the fine performances too.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 101**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE

'HANS ROSBAUD CONDUCTS BRAHMS'

SWR Classic
A well-recommended chance to immerse

yourself in conductor Hans Rosbaud's exploration of the music of Brahms.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 110**

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FOR THE RECORD

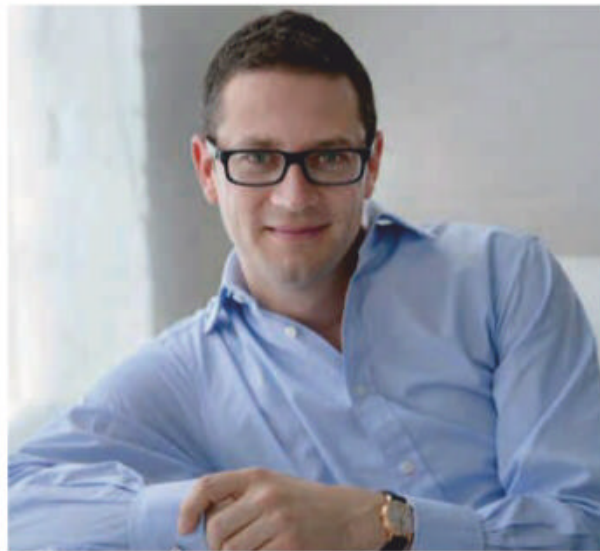
John Wilson revives the Sinfonia of London

Conductor John Wilson has revived a classic orchestra from the past century, the Sinfonia of London, drawing on some of the leading players from London-based ensembles to make one-off recording projects.

The Sinfonia of London was founded in 1955 by flautist Gordon Walker, drawing away many players of the London Symphony Orchestra, to record soundtracks. Among its most memorable albums was a recording with Sir John Barbirolli of Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro* and *Serenade for Strings*, and Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* and *Greensleeves*, issued on HMV in 1963. In its initial incarnation it closed soon after, but was revived in 1982 by Howard Blake for the soundtrack of *The Snowman*, subsequently recording further soundtracks.

Now, under Wilson, it will focus on making recordings for Chandos. Wilson already has a strong relationship with the label, focussed around composers including Copland, Richard Rodney Bennett and Eric Coates. But Wilson and Chandos were keen to make albums of repertoire that didn't fit into such composer-based series, and so Wilson decided to create a flexible group of musicians to undertake them.

And what a group: the first gatherings of players includes, says Wilson, leaders of more than 10 other orchestras, many section principals and members of leading quartets. Despite the illustrious line-up, Wilson is keen to stress: 'it's not in any sense



John Wilson: re-launching the Sinfonia of London

a scratch band – these are people I've had long-standing relationships with, some going back 30 years. We all know one another. There are dialogues between me and the section principals about who they work effectively alongside. So when we get in the room together there is a lot of shared knowledge already there.'

The impressive results can be heard on the project's first release featuring Korngold's *Symphony*, an Editor's Choice in this issue, with Richard Bratby praising the 'weighty, satin string tone, the skyscraping brass and questioning woodwinds'.

For Wilson, the orchestra's name has a strong emotional resonance: 'When I was 11, Barbirolli's 'English String Music' with the Sinfonia of London was the first LP I ever bought. I cherished that record ... If I had one desert island disc, it would be that.' (He's in good company: reviewing it in *Gramophone* on its release, Trevor Harvey described it as 'a recording that can only be called splendiferous'.)

Despite the ensemble's heritage, Wilson says there are no plans to record soundtracks though: 'We have very clear aims, which is to make gramophone records – which I know is a sort of old fashioned concept – we're just very, very slowly and steadily hoping to build up a catalogue of interesting records.' The next release, due early 2020 and already recorded, will be of French orchestral works by Chabrier, Ibert, Debussy, Saint-Saëns, Duruflé and Ravel.

Watch the Gramophone Awards live!

This year's *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards takes place at the De Vere Grand Connaught Rooms, London on October 16. Presented with Apple Music, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute's Polska Music programme and Medici TV, the ceremony can be viewed live (or on catch-up) at Medici TV where you can join us for the acceptance speeches and some high-class live music-making. The soprano Pretty Yende joins *Gramophone*'s James Jolly to co-host the Awards, and we'll also be treated to the vibrant music-making of Poland's Arte dei Suonatori (the period-instrument ensemble who won the Baroque Instrumental Award in 2003 for Vivaldi's *La stravaganza* on Channel Classics).

The ceremony starts at 6.30pm (UK time) and will feature the 10 recording awards (see the short list on page 16) as well as awards for Artist, Young Artist and Lifetime Achievement, Label of the Year, Orchestra of the Year and a new award, Concept Album. Last year more than 95,000 people watched the Awards either live or on catch-up – let's pass the 100,000 mark this time round! As well as the Medici TV stream, the awards will be covered live on our Twitter feed and on Facebook and Instagram – you can find links to all these, plus all the information you need to know about our Awards, at gramophone.co.uk.



Pretty Yende: our Awards co-host

Our month on Medici

With their red trousers and blue jackets, the National Youth Orchestra of the USA cut quite a dash and their playing is pretty impressive too. If you missed their visit to the Proms catch them at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie – the programme includes including Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été* (with a colour-coordinated Joyce DiDonato) and Richard Strauss's *Alpine Symphony*, conducted by Antonio Pappano. Catch the Tchaikovsky Competition's Woodwind Gold Medallist Matvey Demin in Ibert's delightful Flute Concerto at a Pacific Festival Concert in Sapporo under Valery Gergiev. On the opera front, you can watch one of this year's Award nominees, Brett Dean's *Hamlet*, filmed at its premiere run at Glyndebourne. Dipping into the archive, we have a 1980 performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto with Itzhak Perlman and the Philharmonia, Giulini conducting. For our monthly choice, just go to medici.tv and search for 'Gramophone selects'.

DG unveils its Beethoven box-set

Deutsche Grammophon has unveiled its plans for its Beethoven 250th anniversary celebrations. Following DG and Decca's Mozart 225 and Bach 333 projects – both beautifully packaged, not to mention comprehensive, surveys of their subjects – we will shortly have 'Beethoven – The New Complete Edition'.

Containing 123 discs, offering 175 hours of music – including two hours of newly recorded music of recent discoveries and fragments, by artists including Daniel Hope, Lang Lang and Daniel Müller-Schott – the set has been created in cooperation with the Beethoven-Haus Bonn, and will be released on November 8 priced at around £225, alongside the release of 16 digital albums.

Drawn from the Deutsche Grammophon catalogue – a label which, appropriately enough, is believed to have made the first completed recording of Beethoven's Fifth, in 1913 – as well as from Decca and some other labels, the box will reflect the spread of performing traditions – with works presented in both period and modern instrument performances – and gather



together some of the most significant recordings of Beethoven's music in the catalogue, from artists including Karl Böhm, Alfred Brendel, Claudio Arrau, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, John Eliot Gardiner, Herbert von Karajan, Anne-Sophie Mutter and Murray Perahia. Newly commissioned essays and commentaries from leading Beethoven scholars will also feature. Daniel Hope, spokesperson for the set and the new President of the Beethoven-Haus Bonn from 2020, calls the project 'a much needed focus on the creative output of a titan'.

ONE TO WATCH

Matthew Zalkind Cellist

Kodály's majestic Sonata for solo cello, Op 8, is the greatest utterance for solo cello since Bach wrote his six Cello Suites. It is quite a statement for any cellist to set down this work on disc, let alone to have the courage to do so on a debut recording. Nevertheless, Matthew Zalkind, a native of Salt Lake City, Utah, who studied at Juilliard and the University of Michigan, seems



unperturbed by this music's reputation. His debut recording, for Avie (warmly reviewed by Andrew Farach-Colton on page 68), prefaces the Kodály with Bach's Suite No 6, originally written for a five-stringed instrument but now more usually played (as by Zalkind) on the standard four, and a rather slighter, Baroque-inspired Suite for solo cello by a friend of the cellist, the composer and

pianist Michael Brown. It's a hugely impressive achievement from a young musician with, we hope, a long recording career ahead of him.

Zalkind is clearly a probing and intelligent artist, and as AFC notes in his review, 'the sheer joyousness he communicates in every movement' of the Bach is quickly apparent. An enthusiastic chamber musician, he brings an understated eloquence

to everything on this disc. Even when the Kodály is at its most pyrotechnic, Zalkind conveys a sense of epic spaciousness, more wistful than combustible, in a performance of great maturity. Although at the moment his performing career is unsurprisingly focused on the US, this debut disc ought to bring his playing to wider attention, and we look forward to hearing more of him.

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Podcasts

The Gramophone Podcast series is essential listening, featuring interviews with the leading artists and composers of our time. It is free to enjoy on the podcast platform of your choice or via the *Gramophone* website.



Recently, Editor-in-Chief James Jolly met Danny Elfman, who is known to millions for his scores for over 100 movies, including many collaborations with the director Tim Burton, not to mention his inimitable title music for *The Simpsons*. This summer he released a new album on Sony Classical containing his Violin Concerto and Piano Quartet. The concerto, written for and played by Sandy Cameron, joined by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra conducted by John Mauceri, was the subject of a fascinating conversation, but they started by talking about the emergence of the specialist film composer in the past 50 or so years.

The Listening Room

The Listening Room is our playlist dedicated to the most compelling new classical releases. By following the playlist on Apple Music you will be given access to pre-release tracks and complete works from the best new classical albums. To enjoy the playlist, search for The Listening Room on Apple Music.

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ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Thomas Trotter on the organ of Christ Church, Spitalfields

“The organ of Christ Church, Spitalfields, on which I’ve recorded my new album ‘From Palaces to Pleasure Gardens’ was built in 1735 by Richard Bridge, one of the leading organ builders of the day. Considered to be his masterpiece, at the time it was the largest organ in the country and remained so for the next 80 years. Pipe organs have always been susceptible to the fashions of the day and in the 19th century the Victorians either threw out these old instruments or they altered them beyond recognition. The extraordinary thing about this organ is that so much of it has survived (it even survived the Blitz!), certainly enough for the organ builder William Drake to recreate the original 1735 scheme in the recent restoration. Visually it remains unaltered, retaining its gilded pipes and beautiful mahogany case with serpentine front and exquisite carved detail. The organ is placed very high up on the west wall of the church, much higher even than the galleries which run along the sides of the church. The advantage of a recording is that well-placed microphones can reveal much more clarity and detail in the playing than a person standing on the floor of the church could ever hear. Quite literally you get a bird’s eye view, and that’s the case with many other organs too.

Unlike the continent, where most large instruments of the 18th century were equipped with pedalboards, in England pedals were only introduced gradually and even where they were available English organists seemed reluctant to use them. Pedals were added to the Spitalfields organ in the 1830s and Drake made the decision to retain them even though they didn’t exist in the original 1735 scheme. It was a good decision as it enables organists to play a much wider range of music than would otherwise be possible. I use them on this recording in my own arrangements of concertos by Handel and J C Bach as well as in an original work by the English composer William Russell.

My aim on the recording is to showcase some of the rich and varied sounds on offer, and focusing on composers contemporary with the organ was the obvious way of achieving this. The tuning is mean tone (fifth comma for the technically minded!) which means that while the effect of some accidentals and modulations are heightened, certain more outlandish keys simply don’t work. That’s why nearly all the music I have selected is written in C, D, F or G major. Like the French, English



organ composers of the 18th century were very colour-conscious and wrote their ‘voluntaries’ with particular sounds in mind. I’ve included a remarkable voluntary by Johann Christoph Pepusch which consists of 12 separate movements each calling for a different stop or combination of stops. These include the Cornet and Trumpet complete with echo effects, Bassoon, Sesquialtera, Twelfth and Cremona (a precursor of the Clarinet). The piece is tailor-made for an organ like Spitalfields

which is blessed with a wide range of imitative stops. One of the most interesting of those rarely found in 18th-century organs is the French horn stop. The French horn became a popular instrument after Handel used it in his *Water Music*, and the organ stop is demonstrated here in a voluntary by John Stanley, who was Master of the King’s Music and Organist at the nearby Temple Church.

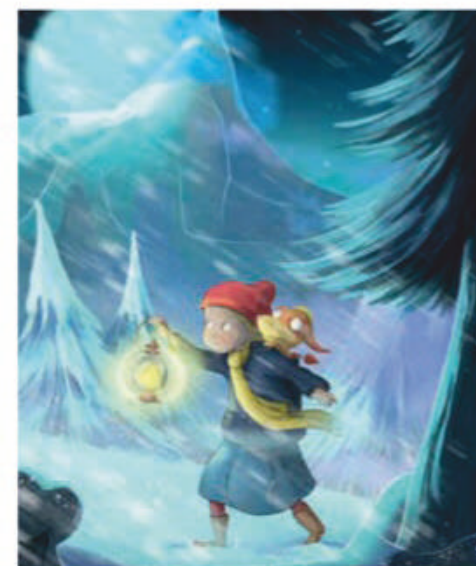
If this was Bridge’s magnum opus, then in terms of organ restoration this was William Drake’s magnum opus, and it’s poignant that Bill died just a year before it was completed. He would certainly have been very satisfied with the spectacular way it has turned out.” *‘From Palaces to Pleasure Gardens’ (available now on Regent) will be reviewed in the next issue*

BBC commissions musical Morpurgo film

The BBC has commissioned a musical animation of Sir Michael Morpurgo’s children’s book *Mimi and the Mountain Dragon*. It will feature a score composed by Oscar-winning composer Rachel Portman, to be recorded by the BBC Philharmonic and the Hallé’s family of choirs, and to be broadcast on BBC One this Christmas period.

The film was commissioned by Jan Younghusband, Head of BBC Music Commissioning for Television, who had initially approached Morpurgo to write a children’s story that could be set to classical music. Morpurgo – a former Children’s Laureate whose works include *War Horse* – will introduce the film. Portman’s achievements, meanwhile, embrace a vast number

of soundtracks for television and films, including *Chocolat* and *The Cider House Rules*, as well as *The Little Prince*, a children’s opera. The film, based on original illustrations by Emily Gravett, and adapted for screen by novelist, poet and playwright Owen Sheers, will be made by Leopard Pictures and animation studio Factory.





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Brahms, Chopin & Debussy **12pm Queen Elizabeth Hall**

Featuring: Jess Gillam, Jörg Widmann, Víkingur Ólafsson, István Várdai, Alice Sara Ott, Andreas Scholl and Tamar Halperin.

Music from Bach to Birtwistle **3:30pm Queen Elizabeth Hall**

Featuring: Lucienne Renaudin Vary, Ksenija Sidorova, Alban Gerhardt, Leticia Moreno, Daniel Kharitonov, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Pekka Kuusisto, Barbara Hannigan, Tamara Stefanovich, and Pierre-Laurent Aimard.

One Orchestra, Four Great Conductors **7pm Royal Festival Hall**

Featuring: Paavo Järvi, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Elim Chan and Vladimir Ashkenazy conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra, with music by Schubert, R. Strauss, Tchaikovsky and Elgar.

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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO *Opera buffa*

Richard Wigmore offers a guide to comic opera, a genre illuminated by Mozart's genius

As with every vocal genre he touched, it was Mozart who redefined *opera buffa* – literally ‘comic opera’. In a sense all that came before seems like a protracted upbeat.

Italian comic operas with sung recitative – for which the terms *opera buffa*, *dramma giocoso* and *commedia per musica* were virtually interchangeable – were popular in Naples from the early 18th century. Unlike the idealised figures of *opera seria*, their characters were drawn from everyday life, with roots in the *commedia dell'arte*. Casts typically included two pairs of lovers and a lecherous bass.

After around 1730 *opera buffa* became more cosmopolitan and migrated north. Venice succumbed after the triumph of Gaetano Latilla's European hit *La finta cameriera* in 1743. A gifted local composer, Baldassare Galuppi, quickly got in on the act, producing a stream of successful comedies with his fellow-Venetian Goldoni. *Il filosofo di campagna* (1754), Galuppi's masterpiece, is characteristic in its combination of sparkling melodies and ‘chain’ finales that gradually ratchet up the tension.


Leading *opera buffa* composers of a later generation include Niccolò Piccinni, whose *La buona figliuola* (1760) sets a ‘sentimental’ Goldoni libretto adapted from Richardson's *Pamela*, *Cimarosa* and Paisiello, whose 1782 *Il barbiere di Siviglia* held the stage until swept aside by Rossini's masterpiece. Martín y Soler's *Una cosa rara* was the Viennese opera sensation of 1786, prompting Mozart to quote it in the *Don Giovanni* supper scene.

Mozart wrote his first *opera buffa*, *La finta semplice*, at 12, following it up with the comedy of mistaken identity *La finta*



Count Almaviva discovers Cherubino in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*

giardiniera (1775). But with the Viennese premiere of *Figaro* on May 1, 1786 the game changed. There were precedents for the opera's social and sexual tensions, and its extended ‘chain’ finales. But *Figaro* leaves its predecessors standing, in its structure (owing much to Da Ponte's ingenious filleting of Beaumarchais's play), its psychological realism, and the way Mozart's music simultaneously illuminates character and hurtles the drama forward. Mozart's instrumentation, too, here and in *Figaro*'s successors, *Don Giovanni* (misinterpreted by the Romantics as a heroic tragedy) and *Così fan tutte*, was unprecedentedly rich, with the wind instruments both colourists and commentators on the action.

After Mozart *opera buffa* waned. Early 19th-century classics are Rossini's *Barbiere*, and Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, where comedy is infused with pathos, and the brittle *Don Pasquale*. By mid-century the term had become obsolete. Yet in an era dominated by *verismo* and tragic-philosophical brooding, the effervescent spirit of *opera buffa* lived on in Verdi's operatic swansong *Falstaff* and its natural successor, Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*. 

► Listen to our opera buffa playlist on Qobuz

IN THE STUDIO

● **Daniel Müller-Schott** has just recorded Saint-Saëns's Cello Concerto No 1 for Orfeo. On August 29, the cellist was at the Jesus-Christus Church in Berlin for the session, for which he was joined by conductor Alexandre Bloch and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. The release date is yet to be confirmed.

● **Lucy Parham's** ‘I, Clara’ project (see My Music, page 138) was recorded in June for the Deux-Elles label with Dame Harriet Walter as narrator. The pianist and actor were at Air Edel Studios on June 18 for the recording, which will be released in October to coincide with Parham's performance at the London Piano Festival.

● **Jonathan Biss** was at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York City, from June 9 to 12 to record the ninth and final volume of his complete Beethoven Piano Sonatas series. The repertoire – comprising No 7 in D, Op 10 No 3; No 18 in E flat, Op 31 No 3; and No 32 in C minor, Op 111 – will be released in early- to mid-November on Orchid Classics, while a bumper box-set of all nine volumes is due out in early 2020.

● **Nicholas Phan** and pianist Myra Huang have recorded Lili Boulanger's seminal song cycle *Clairières dans le ciel*, alongside other works by the composer and her sister Nadia, for Avie. The duo were at Skywalker Sound Studios in California at the end of June for the recording, which, following on from Phan and Huang's disc ‘Illuminations’, continues the tenor's exploration of French song. The album is set for release in January 2020.

● After the success of their previous album ‘Gardens of Delight’, **The Telling** return with ‘The Secret Life of Carols’, recorded on August 4-8 at St Mary Magdalene's Church in Sherborne for release on First Hand Records in December. The programme includes carols from the Middle Ages and lesser-known traditional carols from across Europe, as well as favourites such as an arrangement of *Stille Nacht*.

● **Tamsin Waley-Cohen** is gearing up for Beethoven Year by recording his violin sonatas for Signum. As this issue of *Gramophone* goes on sale, the violinist will be nearing the end of a three-day session at Snape Maltings with Huw Watkins. A spring 2020 release date is planned.

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

Czech Philharmonic

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

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Music Director Semyon Bychkov

‘This orchestra does not sound the same as others,’ the late Jiří Bělohlávek told Neil Fisher in a 2017 *Gramophone* interview (06/17), describing the idiosyncrasies of his Czech Philharmonic; ‘we are happy that we have that quality, and that we can guard it.’

The phenomenon of this 99 per cent ethnically Czech orchestra’s sound is bound up with nationhood and repertoire. As the ‘national’ orchestra, it opens every annual Prague Spring Festival with Smetana’s *Má vlast*, a score whose gait seems to espouse the very qualities talked of as specific to this institution: bounce, flow, rugged nobility, a certain limpid, soft-edged lyricism, a way of pointing up dance rhythms without choreographing them. There’s even an air of relaxation to certain corners of the orchestra’s 2008 *Má vlast* under Bělohlávek that’s there in Václav Talich’s account from 89 years earlier.

Talich was talismanic, but the story began long before he arrived. Two years after a prototype ensemble was formed at the Prague National Theatre, Dvořák conducted his music with the new Czech Philharmonic in what is now cited as its date of birth: January 4, 1896. This was an orchestra that served conducting composers well. Mahler agreed to have it premiere his Seventh Symphony in 1908, on one condition: there be 26 rehearsals.

After Talich’s 22 years on the podium (with a small interregnum), Rafael Kubelík worked hard on technique as war raged. Karel Ančerl, chief for 18 years to 1968, deepened those flowing qualities courtesy of his lyrical conducting style before Václav Neumann (a former member) insisted on a certain pliant flexibility that enlivened his refreshing and typically grainy Dvořák cycle for Supraphon, recordings that rarely get the recognition they deserve (if you only sample one, make it the Eighth).



After that came Bělohlávek’s first tenure of just two years, followed by a meltdown that lasted two decades and whose reversal would eventually see him return in 2012. The whole saga is recounted in detail in Neil Fisher’s profile,

which movingly talks of Bělohlávek’s contract extension to 2022 (the conductor died days after the story was published).

That was a body blow to an orchestra in the midst of resurrection, but there was an obvious saviour in Semyon Bychkov who had already started a Tchaikovsky cycle with the orchestra, now signed to Decca. It’s a joy to be hearing new recordings from the orchestra, but to dip into its plush back catalogue is to listen to history itself. **Andrew Mellor**

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Piemontesi joins Pentatone



Francesco Piemontesi, the Swiss pianist who has been progressively building a fine discography on a number of labels, most recently Orfeo (including an impressive First Book of Liszt’s *Années de pèlerinage*) and Linn (Mozart’s Piano Concertos Nos 25

and 26), has joined Pentatone. His debut on the label will be Schubert’s profound last three sonatas, due for release on September 20.

Melbourne role for Xian Zhang

The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra has named Xian Zhang its new Principal Guest Conductor, from 2020. She is currently Music Director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and held the same post for Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi until 2016, the year she was also announced as the first female conductor to have a titled role with a BBC orchestra when she was appointed Principal Guest of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales..

Night Under the Stars line-up

Tenor Michael Fabiano and soprano Joyce El-Khoury will headline this year’s annual fundraising gala for London-based homeless charity The Passage, ‘Night under the Stars’. Taking place at the Royal Festival Hall on November 5, the theme is Italian opera, and the concert also features the Orion Orchestra and homeless organisation Streetwise Opera. 3000 people a year – more than 150 a day – use the charity’s resource centre, and since its foundation in 1980 The Passage has helped more than 130,000 people end their homelessness. Tickets from passage.org.uk or southbankcentre.co.uk.

FROM WHERE I SIT


What can we expect next from last year's Young Artist of the Year, Lise Davidsen, asks Edward Seckerson



It's always exciting when a significant new voice arrives on the music scene and Decca really pushed the boat out a couple of months back for the debut release of the young Norwegian soprano Lise Davidsen. She might just be the most important signing to the label since the glory days of Birgit Nilsson. As voices they couldn't be more different – a fact that Davidsen was keen to stress when I interviewed her at the launch – but lazy comparisons are apt to be drawn when a singer inhabits the repertoire of a lyric/dramatic *fach* and as some of us know all too well one size does not fit all.

Davidsen's voice comes from a much more lyric place than other weighty voices in her *fach* – as witness the Strauss content of her debut album – and it was interesting to me that I should have first heard her, not in the *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Glyndebourne that first turned everyone's heads, but in the Verdi Requiem at last year's Proms. It was unquestionably one of the most accomplished accounts of the soprano role that I have ever heard and it flourished in all those aspects where big voices so often fall short. A great deal of that piece is about 'quiet and high', the floating, the spinning of tone. And it wasn't just the technical prowess that impressed – the ability to juxtapose the fire and brimstone of its *Libera me* with the treacherous and sustained top B flat which our ears demand be bang in tune and *piano* – but Davidsen's intuitive sense of its drama. And all this from a girl from a tiny village in Norway who as a child just wanted to play her guitar and become the next Joni Mitchell.

The most notable feature of voices like Davidsen's (and again I am not in any way suggesting uniformity) is the girth of the sound. The main reason that she will in time be seized upon to sing many of the great Wagnerian roles – and she was already at Bayreuth this summer giving her Elizabeth in *Tannhäuser* – is the amplitude of that all-important middle voice. For all the sporadic above-the-stave fireworks of an Isolde or a Brünnhilde – not least the latter's blood-curdling battle cry 'Hojotoho!' – the vast proportion of these roles sit lower in the voice where the words can better communicate the drama of sung dialogue in a more 'conversational' manner. It's why so many mezzo-leaning voices – like those of Petra Lang and Waltraud Meier – graduate to Wagner's heroines.

But maintaining a lyric/dramatic voice can be a challenge for the best of them and it was interesting hearing Davidsen articulate such a clear understanding of where her voice is at and where it might be going. I particularly wanted to know (with Verdi in mind) if she would be seeking to maintain a balance between the Italian and German repertoire? That can so often be the key to preserving the lyric 'long line' of a voice where the middle can flourish at the expense of the top. The answer, I'm pleased to say, was a resounding yes, though *what* exactly remains to be seen. Russian repertoire? One enticing prospect she did reveal was Lisa in Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*. She took the words right out of my mouth. 

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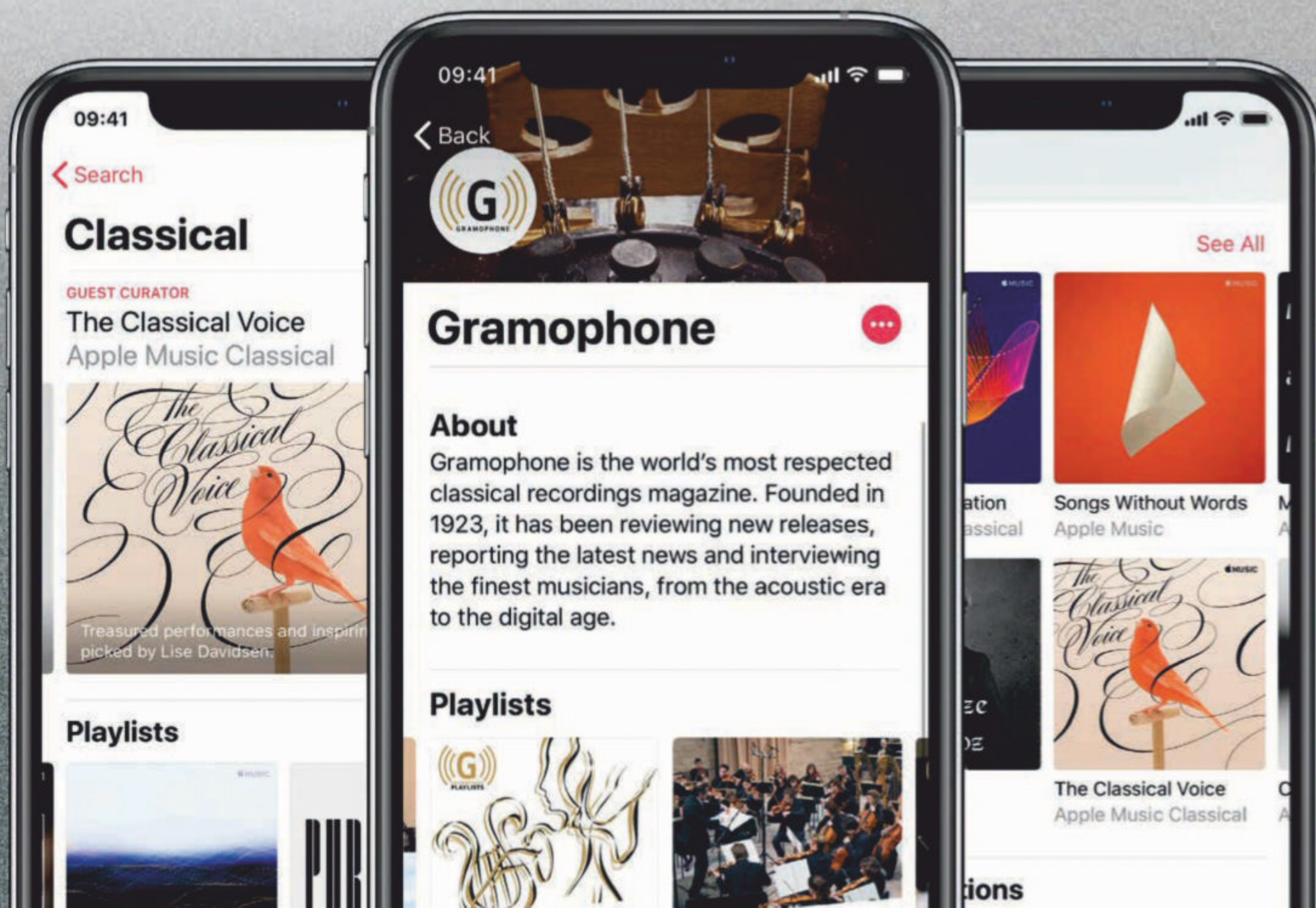
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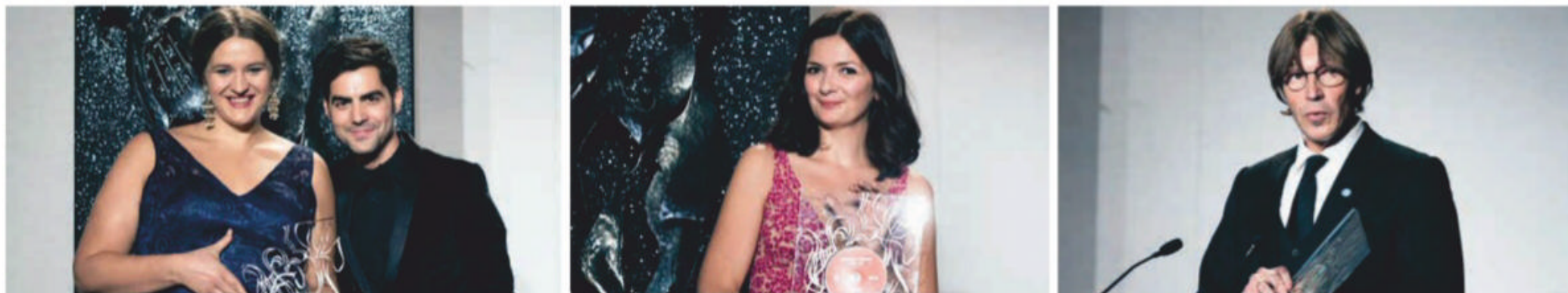
THE SHORTLIST

Our critics have completed their months of listening and we've reached the final round of the **2019 Gramophone Classical Music Awards**. Find out overleaf which 30 recordings have made it to the final three in each of the 10 categories. The winners will be revealed on October 1 at **gramophone.co.uk** and the special awards will be revealed on October 16.



PHOTOGRAPHY: BENJAMIN EALOVEGA

Last year's Gramophone Classical Music Awards ceremony took place at the De Vere Grand Connaught Rooms in London, a magnificent venue that we return to this year



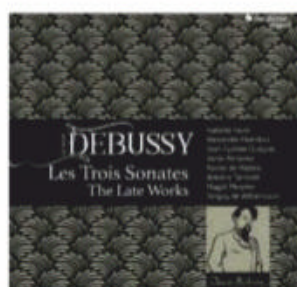
Winners in 2018: Lise Davidsen (Young Artist of the Year) with Miloš Karadaglić, Marianne Crebassa (Solo Vocal, Opera and Recording of the Year) and Kaspars Putniņš (Choral)

CHAMBER

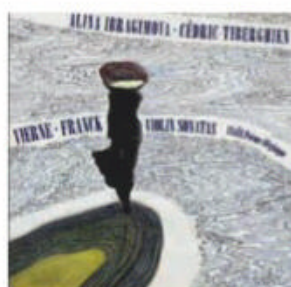
- **Britten. Purcell** String Quartets **Doric Quartet** Chandos
- **Debussy** Trois Sonates **Isabelle Faust, Antoine Tamestit, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Alexander Melnikov, Javier Perianes et al** Harmonia Mundi
- **Franck. Vienne** Violin Sonatas **Alina Ibragimova, Cédric Tiberghien** Hyperion



Chandos Ⓜ ②
CHAN20124 (5/19)



Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ
HMM90 2303 (11/18)



Hyperion Ⓢ
CDA68204 (3/19)

CHORAL

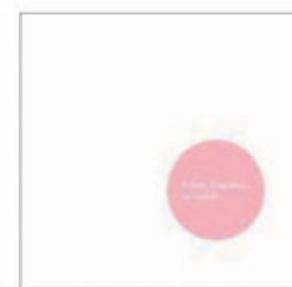
- **Buxtehude** Abendmusiken **Vox Luminis / Lionel Meunier; Ensemble Masques / Olivier Fortin** Alpha
- **Monteverdi** Vespers **Collegium Vocale Gent / Philippe Herreweghe** PHI
- **'A Rose Magnificat'** **Gabrieli Consort / Paul McCreesh** Signum



Alpha Ⓢ
ALPHA287 (9/18)



PHI Ⓢ ②
LPH029 (10/18)



Signum Ⓢ
SIGCD536 (7/18)

CONCERTO

- **Adams** Violin Concerto **Leila Josefowicz; St Louis SO / David Robertson** Nonesuch
- **Busoni** Piano Concerto **Kirill Gerstein; Boston SO / Sakari Oramo** Myrios
- **Saint-Saëns** Piano Concertos Nos 2 & 5 **Bertrand Chamayou; Orchestre National de France / Emmanuel Krivine** Erato



Nonesuch Ⓢ
7559 79351-O (6/18)



Myrios Ⓢ
MYRO24 (3/19)



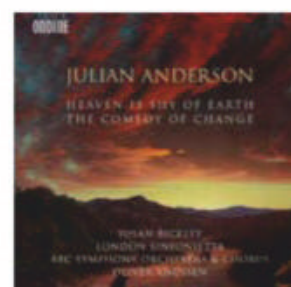
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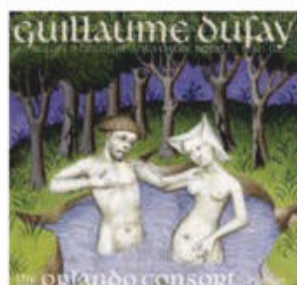
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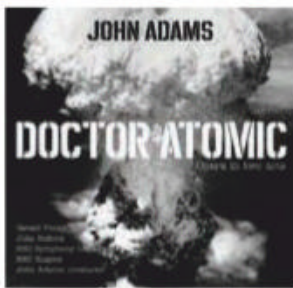
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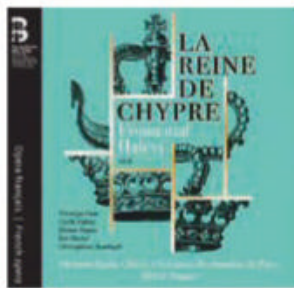
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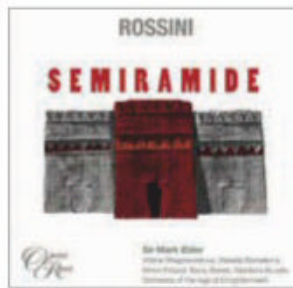
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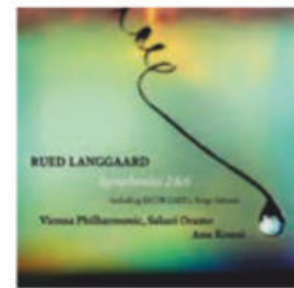
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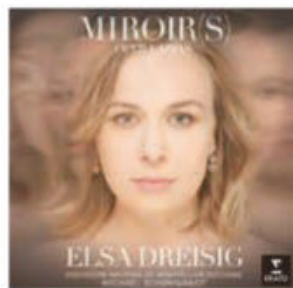
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CHRISTIAN TETZLAFF



Finding freedom in the score

As Christian Tetzlaff returns to the Beethoven and Sibelius violin concertos, James Jolly finds out why he's considered one of the greatest violinists of our time

For the conductor Paavo Järvi, there are two kinds of soloist: 'Those who leave after they've played their concerto and meet you later for dinner. And then there are the people who *always* take the opportunity to listen to the symphonic work in the second half. And Christian is one of those. He has a *profound* interest in music – not just violin music – but music in general. It sounds like that should be very normal but it's not.' And, as if to prove Järvi's point, who should be sitting in front of me in Berlin's Philharmonie a few weeks later for Rachmaninov's Second Symphony, having just given an extraordinary performance of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, but Christian Tetzlaff.

That performance of the Beethoven, recorded live over two nights, is released this month by Ondine, partnered by Sibelius's concerto; both are with Robin Ticciati conducting the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. Conductors clearly love working with Tetzlaff. 'He's constantly showing me, teaching me,' Ticciati says. 'Hearing him in the Schumann or Brahms sonatas with Lars Vogt, I feel I'm getting a whole new vocabulary of music. It has changed me a lot. And I'm completely obsessed by his trio with his sister Tanja and Lars.' And Järvi says, unequivocally, 'He's one of the greats. He's totally on top form – totally. You learn from him – you hear him *talk* through the music rather than just play the notes. He doesn't do formula.'

For the pianist and conductor Vogt, one of the violinist's closest friends and a musical partner for some 30 years, Tetzlaff 'just knows everything, and understands everything. He has a background knowledge like no one else. Having been so close over so many years, I think we've influenced each other a lot. Where I originally came from was a kind of gut music-making – what felt good to me – and he came completely from the opposite direction: he's very reflective. So often, we musicians

go for what comes across better, and makes us look better. Christian always comes from the core of the music and that's ultimately so satisfying and so much fun. I've learnt a lot from his approach: what does anything a composer write mean? What does it mean stylistically? What did it mean at the time? I've had fantastic teachers and conductors who I've learnt so much from, but there's no one I've learnt more from than Christian.'

Tetzlaff, now 53, has been performing at the highest level for three decades (a Christoph von Dohnányi-conducted Cleveland Orchestra performance, when Tetzlaff was 22, of the Schoenberg Violin Concerto was a major career milestone), yet he wears his position as one of the world's leading violinists very lightly. He's not interested in the trappings of fame or success. What you see, as Järvi points out, is what you get.

'It's totally about interaction and making music in the moment. He's prepared to take huge risks in concert' – Paavo Järvi

'He's someone who has a very happy family life,' he says. 'He's absolutely true to himself and there's a complete honesty to his music-making.' Tetzlaff's shoulder-length hair, worn tied back when he plays, and his relaxed concert attire, hint at a man who is completely comfortable in his own skin. Based in Berlin, he has a young family – aged six, four and two – with a new partner, the Italian photographer Giorgia Bertazzi, and one senses that family plays an enormously important part in his life, on a par with music. 'He has changed, in my opinion, in a fantastic direction,' says Järvi. 'He plays the way he looks now – he has stopped worrying about how others think and has his own way. He's so super-intelligent. He was always a wonderful example of how one could combine a family life and a professional life. He's a very dedicated and loving person – and he's really funny. He has a fantastic sense of humour!'

At about the same time that Tetzlaff started his new life in Berlin (he'd previously lived in Frankfurt with his first wife with whom he has three children), he also embarked on a new recording relationship with Ondine. And Ondine's



'We have this innate understanding': Tetzlaff and Ticciati's Beethoven and Sibelius recording reveals a true meeting of minds

Reijo Kiilunen couldn't be happier with the partnership, which has brought numerous rapturous reviews and plentiful awards (including *Gramophone's* Concerto Award last year). 'It started back in 2010', says Kiilunen, 'when I learnt that Christian had recorded the Mendelssohn and Schumann concertos and that there was no label yet for the recording. So I jumped in and luckily managed to get it for Ondine. As a record collector I'd been a great fan for a long time. And then we got talking and Christian said he was working a lot with Lars Vogt, and as I was keen to continue the partnership, it just started from there. He offers so many possibilities – duo work with Lars, concerto recordings, solo recordings and he has his own trio and quartet.

So I was thrilled to have him on board. I really do think he's one of the greatest violinists of our time.'

Tetzlaff has a total horror of routine or any kind of fixed approach to the works he plays. When *The Telegraph's* Ivan Hewett asked him in 2011 if he was concerned about the dangers of staleness creeping in when he revealed he'd played the Brahms concerto 33 times in recent years, his sense of shock was obvious: 'Why? The piece isn't getting any worse. And every time it's a new audience, who have to be taken on this fantastic journey.' As Järvi points out, 'What I like is that Christian has an incredibly strong opinion and point of view – not an opinion that comes from habit ("Here I do a *rallentando*") – we never talk about that sort of thing because that's part of natural music-making, we're in touch musically and it just happens), but there is a conceptual point of view about which he's very passionate. And that's what you look for from him. I have done the same piece with him enough times to see those conventions also change. Certain things become less important to him, certain things more. It's great. So often, conducting soloists becomes a kind of servicing, which is the worst possible situation to be in, a sort of cat-and-mouse game where you're trying to ensure everything is comfortable. And you don't have any real interaction. With Christian it's totally about interaction and making music in the moment. One thing with him

is that he's prepared to take huge risks in concert, and risks are fantastic, but they are exactly that: risks. And what I like is that he does things for the emotion of it rather than to be safe.'

Beethoven wrote his only Violin Concerto in 1806 and though it was not particularly successful at its Vienna premiere, it was revived in the 1840s by a 12-year-old Joseph Joachim with Mendelssohn conducting. It quickly secured its position at the heart of the violin-concerto repertoire, and the genre – as so often is the case with any that Beethoven touched – was raised to a new level: a classical medium so gracefully done by Haydn and

Mozart had been taken and given an almost symphonic ambition (its 25-minute first movement could comfortably accommodate the whole of Mozart's Third Violin Concerto, for example). Sibelius, an accomplished violinist (which Beethoven was not), wrote his sole concerto in 1904, almost exactly 100 years after the Beethoven, and revised it the following year to give us the version we invariably hear today. 'I'm sure Christian is fascinated by the fact that these are two pieces that are totally alone, isolated peaks,' Ticciati suggests.

The Beethoven and Sibelius violin concertos have seldom been coupled on a recording before. 'You can either go for the old *Monty Python* "And now for something completely different" approach,' says Tetzlaff, 'or you can start searching. I find enough to make the pairing plausible. They both come from the beginning of new centuries, they're both Janus-like. Beethoven is firmly in the Haydn-Mozart tradition, but also looking ahead in a completely different way. And for me the Sibelius is the same. He's a very modern composer in his intentions. A few days ago, here in Berlin, we played his *Voces intimae* String Quartet, and that's a wild piece. In the Fourth Symphony's first movement he goes atonal, but that's not his trademark, and it is not the only thing that defines him as a modern composer. But structurally, yes, he's still rooted in the Romantic tradition and yet looking forward into the new century. So I think both composers have a similar function – very different from Brahms, who really expanded the Beethoven concerto model. I think Sibelius did for his century what Beethoven did for his.'

'In his pianissimos, the sound hangs on by a hair. I'm amazed by his courage for fragility, to seek 'non-beauty' – Lars Vogt

Tetzlaff has recorded both the Beethoven and Sibelius concertos before – in fact, this is his third version of the Beethoven having been partnered by Michael Gielen and the SWR SO Baden-Baden in 1988 and by David Zinman and Zurich's Tonhalle Orchestra in 2005. His first Sibelius dates from 2002, one of his last recordings for Virgin Classics – the company that initially spotted his huge potential; 'Here is a reading which, in its no-holds-barred fervour, reminds me more than most of the wild theatricality and solo fireworks one encounters in the Concerto's original version,' wrote Andrew Achenbach back in April 2003. What links the three performances of the Beethoven, though (and indeed every live performance he's ever given), is the use of Beethoven's own cadenza for his piano transcription of the concerto, 'retro-fitted' for the violin and employing the timpani. 'Often a cadenza can be totally unrelated to the piece and quite often uses harmonies that are wrong because they are from a completely different time,' Tetzlaff explains. 'What Kreisler does is beautiful but a bit silly in playing all the melodies – and he even quotes the second subject. So it makes sense to me that if you have Beethoven's cadenzas, you should use them. I think the bitterness of some aspects of the first movement are brought out by the use of this cadenza. The military feel is pushed even more with the use of the timpani. So the cadenza is a further explanation of the nature of the piece and not a display of virtuosity.'

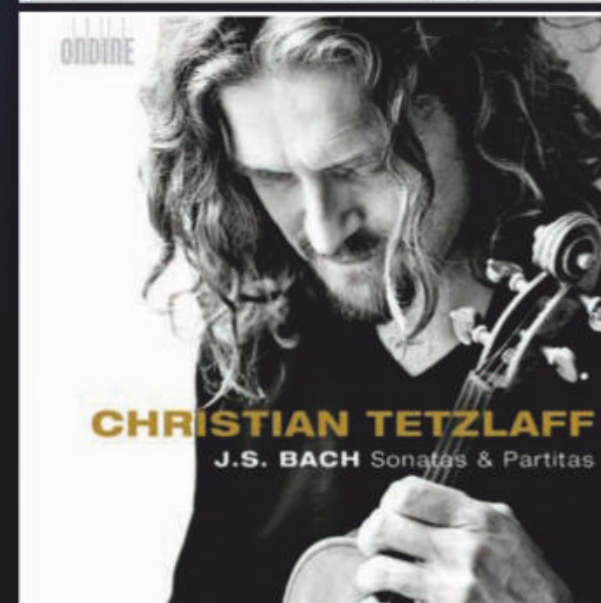
Very striking in the two Berlin concerts – and very faithfully carried over onto the new recording – is not only how well this cadenza fits the first movement's dramaturgy but also how it

CHRISTIAN TETZLAFF ON ONDINE

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Fearless: 'Some players have a whole complex of beliefs about how they should appear, but he doesn't care about that stuff' (Järvi)

helps generate the momentum to propel the movement to its conclusion, a conclusion that surely demands some kind of applause. Laughing, Ticciati recalls a performance with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe in Rotterdam: 'I *do* remember the performance, but what I remember more is Roger Federer bringing his mum round afterwards!' Tetzlaff picks up the story: 'I remember Federer coming up to me and saying "Very well done, but why did nobody clap after the first song?" And that is so right, on so many levels, because if there's no clapping after the first movement, maybe you've done something wrong. The audience can be too well educated, because what Beethoven goes for is an explosion at the end of the first movement.'

One word that often crops up in reviews of Tetzlaff's performances, whether live or recorded, is 'spontaneous'. No two performances are exactly the same, as Järvi has said, but there's more to it than an on-the-wing creativity – there's also a fearlessness. As Järvi puts it, 'A lot of players have this fear that if they don't project, somehow people will think they have a small sound, or don't have a good violin; and they have a whole complex of beliefs about how a violinist should appear ... He doesn't care about that stuff.' And when I ask Tetzlaff about the striking range of dynamics that he employs in the Beethoven, suggesting that perhaps his passion for chamber music plays some role, his answer is direct: 'No, it emerges from looking at the music. I think a lot of so-called tradition comes from laziness. The first movement is written *piano* explicitly for the solo violin. And that is totally right so that the outbursts work properly in the right places. And I also know that anyone who has the conviction can play *pianissimo* and can feel at home. It's simply about wanting

the audience to open their ears and participate. When it gets really soft, the audience *has* to participate, to actively listen. When it's loud, it's done *to* you. Those are the best moments: when everything comes together in beauty and its ability to touch people. In the big concertos, if you look at the score and listen to what is done, they match in only every 30th bar. That comes from the idea that in the solo repertoire the artistic freedom of the soloist is paramount, that he has to dominate the orchestra and be the most important thing. And that's silly because a great composer like Beethoven or Brahms uses all his craft and inner life in the same way in a solo concerto as in a string quartet. There are so many passages in both the Beethoven and the Brahms concertos where you have to accompany, for example, the oboe. And that's where it becomes real fun.

A soloist standing in front of the orchestra expecting 100 people to follow them I find ridiculous most of the time. It's just about the soloist talking about themselves and frankly we have much nicer things to talk about!

Tetzlaff's ability – and willingness – to play very quietly was just one of the things that attracted Kiilunen: 'What I really admire about his playing is how he makes time stand still in *piano* and *pianissimo*. Yet even behind these most fragile moments and sensitive *pianissimos* there's this incredible intensity to his playing.' Take the opening of the Sibelius, which stunned Ticciati when he first heard Tetzlaff play it: 'So many people approach that first line like the waters have frozen over – it's glacial. But what does the score say? *Mezzo forte, dolce ed espressivo*. It's like a folk song, and that's the feeling he goes for. There's no end to how faithful he can be to the score. It forces everyone into a place where you just have to take a risk. What was it that Colin Davis use to say? ... "When you're recording live, there's no second chance." And with Christian that happens every time. It's just so live.' Vogt concurs: 'About his *pianissimos*, you often find yourself saying that he can't dare go even softer, and yet he does, and the sound hangs on by a hair. I'm always amazed by his courage for fragility, this courage to seek "non-beauty". Music isn't all about beauty – it has the entire range of expression. So, this whole idea that this is how violinists are supposed to sound – he doesn't give a damn!'


Even though chamber music accounts for about 30 per cent of Tetzlaff's concert life, it brings to his playing another dimension that violinists who only stick to the concerto repertoire are denied. Vogt believes it brings an entirely different mindset, one that turns its back on the 'I'm the star and I have to be at the centre of things' way of thinking.

Tetzlaff himself explains further: ‘This idea that chamber music is just generally more cultivated, less soloistic and easier is ridiculous – the idea that those who don’t make it to solo work have to fall back on chamber music as if it is some kind of easy option. If I think about what I played last week when we did Beethoven’s Op 130 with the *Grosse Fuge* ... The violin part is vastly more difficult than the Beethoven concerto and it’s way more taxing to play a programme with a Beethoven quartet, a Bartók quartet and a Mozart quartet – the technical challenges are huge.’

When Tetzlaff came to record the Sibelius concerto, it was his first studio concerto recording in nearly 20 years, and perhaps that extra experience of playing chamber music helped because, as he says, ‘Making the connection within the orchestra is so important – “Who hands the melody over, and to whom do I hand it back?” If it only goes through the conductor then it

‘Going for an obsessive approach is the only way to convey the danger and emotions Sibelius describes in his concerto’ – Tetzlaff

will not be free. A conductor who doesn’t listen to the players, doesn’t guide them to connect with the soloist, is diminishing this sense of freedom.’ He speaks of a kind of ‘love triangle’ that functions in an ideal concerto performance between soloist, conductor and orchestra. ‘Hopefully you will hear that we go on a journey, especially in the orchestral parts, that respects all of Sibelius’s markings; and for me, in the violin part, it is a very modern piece in the sense that the composer gives lots of extravagant shadings and markings. There are *diminuendos* on long, strong notes so that I always fade with the orchestra. It reminds me of the acting in early black-and-white silent movies, with the totally expressive faces changing dramatically because there are no words. And this is what Sibelius gives us in the first movement. We go for this obsessive approach because I think that’s the only way to convey the danger and out-of-the-ordinary emotions that he describes in this piece.’

Watching the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin play a concerto is to see numerous examples of quasi-chamber interaction: the first desk of cellos leaning forwards to engage with the soloist, or the solo oboe looking directly at him during those moments of dialogue, a perfect example of that ‘love triangle’ Tetzlaff refers to. During the sessions for the Sibelius, where the only audience were the orchestra’s Intendant and Tetzlaff’s wife, Tetzlaff recalled that discussions with players went far beyond the notes on the page. ‘With Robin,’ Tetzlaff comments, ‘even though we are from different generations and different backgrounds and have different personalities, we have exactly the same language and luckily this works so well with his orchestra. So there were wonderful things like instead of saying, “Could we just play the F major a tiny bit louder, and the D minor a bit softer,” it was “This is a moment of hope,” or, “A shadow falls over this feeling of hope” – and it worked! And everyone knew how “hope” should sound! Or how the disappointment of the next section should feel. This is how we talked in the rehearsal, and it’s so comforting to know that what we are playing is not about the realisation of dynamics but about expressing a very specific quality of emotion. I feel that because of this, Robin and I are like Siamese twins – we have this innate understanding. It made doing the Sibelius and the Beethoven such a joy.’ 

► Christian Tetzlaff’s new Beethoven and Sibelius release is reviewed on page 38



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cyprien
katsaris
Opera songs
for piano

Nelson Goerner

Paderewski
nelson goerner
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Martucci
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Nokturn B-dur
Godowski
Künstlerleben

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The other STANFORD

We have long admired Stanford's church music, but a flurry of new releases, including a first opera recording, may transform our impression of this British composer, writes **Jeremy Dibble**

Today it almost seems like a platitude to extol the virtues of Sir Charles Villiers Stanford's church music. For well over a century it has been sung and admired by Anglican choirs all over the world for the originality of its abundant melody, liturgical appropriateness, variety and, above all, its symphonic vision, qualities that no other composer in the idiom has achieved with the same aplomb. And no one could argue with the extraordinary imagination that produced *The Blue Bird*, perhaps one of the greatest English part-songs ever written. In the last 30 years, however, Stanford has been liberated from many of the straitjackets in which he was erroneously placed, an emancipation which has been assisted by recordings of the symphonies, larger choral works, chamber music, organ music and songs. Acquaintance with these works is now helping us to understand Stanford's much larger and varied output, and to dispel many of the old prejudices. Bernard Shaw's antipathy to Brahms (as an 'academic') as well as to the political establishment, academia and the church, blinded him to any realistic assessment of Stanford's achievements, but the critic's colourful and amusing prose has lingered, and old impressions die hard. Frank Howes connected Stanford with the 'academic tradition' in his book *The English Musical Renaissance* (1966), and perhaps too readily associated him with Parry, even though the two composers were highly different personalities. And while, latterly, Stanford may have been a conservative teacher, famous for his irascibility, he was far from 'academic' in his love of Irish melody, his inventive harmony and the brilliant technical facility he brought to almost every branch of composition. Such facility was the very thing that attracted composition students to him in their droves at the Royal College of Music after it opened in 1883.

The revival of interest in Stanford as a composer, assisted by the foundation of the Stanford Society in 2007, has spurred us on to explore many less familiar areas of his substantial output. This process has been helped enormously by the conservation of Stanford's manuscripts at the British Library, the RCM, the National Library of Ireland and Newcastle University Library (where a virtually complete archive of Stanford's printed music has also been preserved). Yet, while most of Stanford's original manuscripts and pretty much all of his published works have survived, in many instances the performing materials (copyists' scores, orchestral parts) have not. This has, in the past, militated

against the performance of his music. However, with today's enthusiasm, the will to recreate these materials from the original sources has led to the exploration of many hidden treasures, resulting in considerable rewards.

THE MASS 'VIA VICTRIX'

It was precisely this situation which befell the revival of Stanford's *Mass Via victrix* 1914-1918, which he wrote in 1919 to remember all those who had given their lives for the Allied victory. A substantial work of over 60 minutes of music, it required editing from the British Library manuscript so that it could be revived by Adrian Partington, who directed the world-premiere performance in Cardiff in October 2018 with the BBC National Chorus and Orchestra of Wales. The performance was also recorded and released in May on the Lyrita label. Although Boosey published the vocal score in 1920, and it was used for a solitary performance of the *Gloria*

with organ accompaniment in Cambridge that year, the Mass was shelved and largely forgotten. This encapsulates the fate of Stanford's music immediately after the war.

His particular style of writing, influenced by German models, seemed passé in the post-1918 world, when an appetite for new ideas prevailed, and though his agent made numerous attempts to appeal to conductors, much of the music he wrote after 1914 met with indifference.

As Partington says, Stanford's score lacks nothing in terms of its inspiration and quality: 'A playthrough of the work on the piano convinced me that here was an unknown masterpiece. The qualities that I loved in Stanford's music as a boy were in the *Mass Via victrix* in large quantities: tunefulness, energy and drama. But as a more mature musician (50 years on!), I was instantly able to perceive much more than that – a wonderful harmonic sense, vigorous and appropriate counterpoint, infinitely varied scoring, meticulous word-setting, and a most satisfying sense of shape and form.' Indeed, the Mass's theatrical ethos has much in common with Stanford's earlier epic choral works, namely the Requiem (1897), the *Te Deum* (1898) and the *Stabat mater* (1907). The contrast of the funeral Kyrie with the 'reveilles' in the ebullient *Gloria* and *Credo* (truly symphonic in scope) is striking; the euphonious *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* (in the form of a neo-baroque chorale prelude) provide the emotional core; and the unconventional *Agnus Dei* combines an operatic plea for peace from the soprano, an imposing orchestral march

'The Mass has a wonderful harmonic sense, infinitely varied scoring and a most satisfying shape and form' – Adrian Partington

'He found harmony in Ireland': a cartoon of Stanford by 'Spy', published in Vanity Fair, February 2, 1905



and a translucent conclusion in which the text 'dona nobis pacem' assumes special meaning.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Other unpublished orchestral and vocal works were issued recently on Hyperion by the Ulster Orchestra under the highly sympathetic direction of Howard Shelley. 'Having been a chorister, organist and choirmaster in my youth, I have a warm regard for Stanford's choral writing which was cultivated early on,' recalls Shelley. 'It has been lovely to come to his orchestral music later in life and to enjoy his passionate, noble and idiomatic approach. This is matched by a sensitivity to his subject matter, which, on this new recording, ranges from the weighty tragedy of war and its aftermath, to the conjuring up of a fairy world which hovers and shimmers magically in mid-air through his masterly and delicate orchestral accompaniment of a chorus of sopranos and altos.'

There's no doubt that the range of works on this recording emphasises the exceptional breadth of Stanford's technique: there's his own version of 'pomp and circumstance' in *A Welcome March*, written for large orchestra to welcome Edward VII to Ireland in 1903; there's the dramatic *Overture in the Style of a Tragedy* (1903), brilliantly scored and full of advanced chromatic harmony; and there's *Verdun: Solemn March and Heroic Epilogue* (two orchestrated movements of his Organ Sonata No 2 – dedicated to Widor 'and the Great Country to which he belongs'), first performed at the Royal Albert Hall, London, in January 1918. In the last, Stanford's brass-writing is particularly impressive, says Shelley: 'He uses the brass to virile and wonderful effect, including moments for muted trumpet which bring tears to the eyes.' The recording also includes *Fairy Day* (1912), a ravishing set of three idylls for female chorus and small orchestra, dedicated to the St Cecilia Chorus of New York and its conductor Victor Harris (though there is no record of any performance). The disc concludes with a rousing performance of *A Song of Agincourt*, which Stanford wrote in 1918 in memory of those members of the RCM 'who fought, worked, and died for their country'. This piece, whose manuscript lay undisturbed in the National Library of Ireland for decades, and which was extensively revised by the composer in 1919, resembles the form of the composer's Irish rhapsodies, with its vivid contrast of thematic material. Its use of the medieval Agincourt song prefigures its later implementation by Vaughan Williams, Walton and Dyson.

THE STRING QUARTETS

The last four years have witnessed the recording of Stanford's eight string quartets sponsored by the Stanford Society and Durham University and played superbly by the Dante Quartet. Two recordings featuring Quartets Nos 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 have already been issued on the Somm label; Nos 1, 2 and 6 are due out in early 2020 and



Word premiere of the Mass Via victrix in Cardiff, October 2018, with BBC NOW & Chorus under Adrian Partington



Howard Shelley: highly sympathetic orchestral director

a recording of the two string quintets will follow. The project has brought with it numerous challenges: the works are technically demanding, written for the best players of the day, including the Joachim Quartet; and although four of the quartets (Nos 1, 2, 3 and 5) had already been published, the remaining four needed to be prepared in new editions from the surviving manuscripts. This hurdle overcome, recording the quartets has proved to be an enormously rewarding odyssey.

We know from Stanford's composition primer, *Musical Composition: A Short Treatise for Students*, written and published in 1911 and effectively a digest of all he taught to his many students at the RCM and the University of Cambridge, that he held the string quartet to be one of the greatest challenges. It was probably for this reason that he did not attempt his first two works until he was almost 40. As Kryisia Osostowicz, leader of the Dante, acknowledges: 'The invitation for us to record all of Stanford's string quartets was exciting but also daunting. We had only played one of them before, and although the music is wonderfully engaging, and

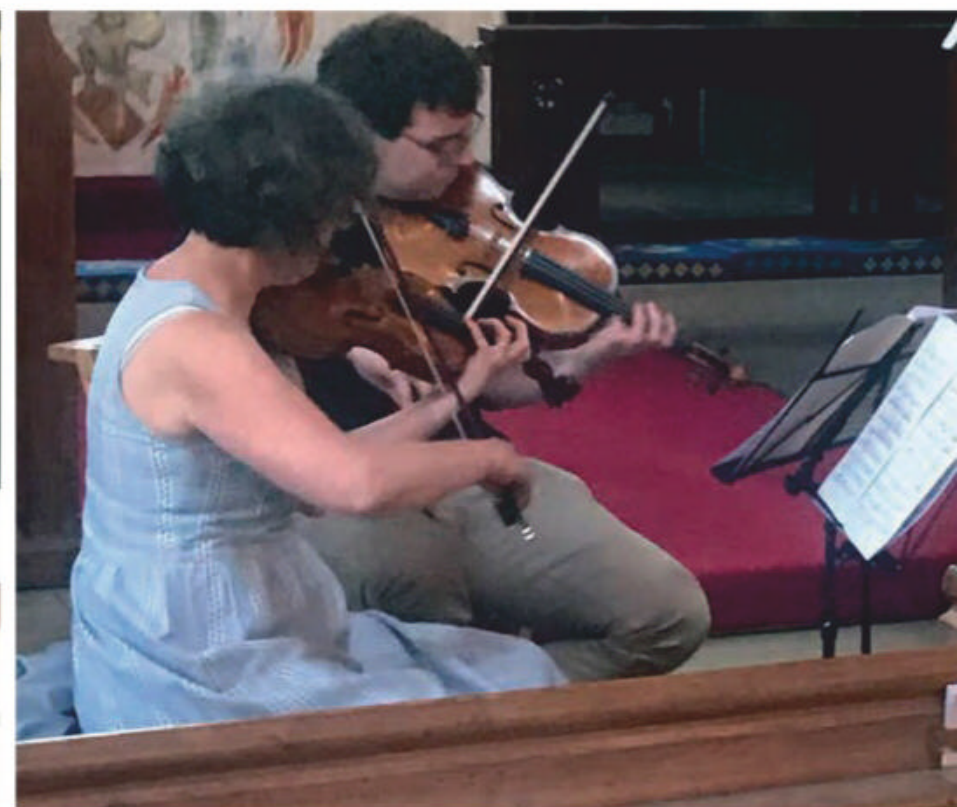
written in a traditional tonal idiom, we knew how challenging the project would be.'

Stanford's quartets undoubtedly owe much to the Austro-German tradition of Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms and Dvořák, but their emotional range, complex counterpoint, memorable melodies and idiomatic writing reveal an individual style. Adds Osostowicz: 'We quickly found that we would need to learn a new language as players: Stanford's quartet-writing is complex and virtuosic in all the parts, with elaborate textures

which need to be very carefully balanced so that the leading voices can always be heard. However, once we got used to playing in a way that brought out both the melodic lines and the filigree detail, each new

movement became a fresh discovery which we looked forward to bringing to light.' First movements of considerable weight, such as those of Nos 2, 3 and 8, which rival those of his continental contemporaries, are balanced by gentle intermezzos (Nos 1, 5 and 6) and ingenious scherzo movements (Nos 2, 4, 5 and 7) full of structural wizardry and thematic transformation. Big-boned

'Each new movement became a fresh discovery which we looked forward to bringing to light' – Kryisia Osostowicz, Dante Quartet



Somm quartet sessions: (from left) Colleen Ferguson (quartet editor), Paul Arden-Taylor (sound engineer), Siva Oke (producer), Jeremy Dibble and the Dante Quartet

slow movements (such as in Nos 1, 3, 5 and 8), some of them in fantasy forms, are among Stanford's most original creations for their long melodies, colourful harmonies and imaginative scoring. And Stanford's finales have an extraordinary sense of élan, be it in the Irish jig fugato of No 1, the sense of *moto perpetuo* in No 4 or the breathtaking quodlibet of melodies towards the end of No 6.

Stanford's Quartets Nos 6 and 8 were not heard during his lifetime, and this was also the fate of the *Overture in the Style of a Tragedy*, *Fairy Day*, the *Mass Via victrix* and Violin Concerto No 2 (which Chandos plans to record in 2020). Stanford was, however, accustomed to disappointment, especially in connection with opera, a genre for which he had the highest aspirations.

THE OPERAS

All through his life Stanford devoted himself to opera in England. He tirelessly campaigned for a national opera house in London and, through the pioneering agency of the RCM opera (which he promoted and conducted), for opera to be performed in English. Although he achieved great success with his *opéra comique* *Shamus O'Brien* (1896), his other eight operas did not establish themselves in the repertory as he had hoped. With his last opera, *The Travelling Companion* (1916), a fine adaptation by Henry Newbolt of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, he hit on the very subject that most suited his fragile chemistry of lyrical melody and subtle harmony. Even though Stanford gained a Carnegie Award for the work in 1917, he did not live to hear his operatic masterpiece staged.

'We were intrigued about rediscovering "The Travelling Companion" – it's like producing a new opera' – David James, NSO

Late in 2018 the work was toured by New Sussex Opera (NSO) to considerable acclaim. For the first time in many decades audiences were treated to some of Stanford's most affecting music. As NSO Artistic Director David James says: 'We were made aware of the existence of *The Travelling Companion* by a mention in a review by Rupert Christiansen (who later told me that he had been told about the opera by

PHOTOGRAPHY: BBC NOW, JULIUSZ MULTARZYNSKI



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NSO's *The Travelling Companion*: Pauls Putnins, Kate Valentine, David Horton (above); Julien Van Mellaerts (below)

Andrew Porter). From the beginning we were intrigued by the prospect of rediscovering a work about which we, and most people we talked to, knew little or nothing – almost like producing a new opera, in fact. Neither our conductor,

Toby Purser, nor our director, Paul Higgins, had worked with NSO before, so it was a learning process for us all. We decided to set our production at the time at which the opera was written – during the First World War. The first night in Lewes was special, of course, as was the subsequent enthusiastically received performance at Cadogan Hall in London. The final performance, in the fine acoustics of Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden, was notable in that it was recorded live for release by Somm. This was doubly exciting for us, in that it was the first-ever recording of any of Stanford's nine operas, and also the first professional recording of a performance by NSO – celebrating our 40th anniversary. To be nominated in the "Rediscovered Work" category of the International Opera Awards was the icing on the cake.'

The recording of *The Travelling Companion* gives us a unique opportunity to hear a side of Stanford's musical style that we have never fully appreciated before. It is brimful of sonorous melody for the four principal soloists, John (tenor), the Travelling Companion (baritone), the Princess (soprano) and the Wizard (bass), but there is also a substantial role for the chorus, and the writing for orchestra, especially in the gossamer ballet music of Act 3, reveals the hand of a true master. The end of the work, when the Travelling Companion's identity is revealed, is surely one of the most moving revelations in all Romantic opera, not least because this poignant epiphany is 'spoken' by the orchestra alone in music of searing beauty.

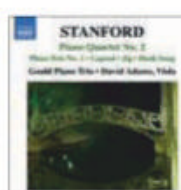
Such pathos may well transform our impression of the sort of composer Stanford was. Through proper acquaintance with his operatic output we may indeed learn to appreciate him as our

most significant composer of opera before Britten, and come to realise that the often discussed 'dearth of British opera' between Purcell and Britten may in fact be a myth. We may also soon come to recognise the rich and abundant eddies of Stanford's 'other' music in terms of its craftsmanship, stature and pure stylishness – attributes, after all, that we have always admired in his church music. Perhaps, with this new procession of recordings, Stanford's time has finally arrived. **G**

'The Travelling Companion' is released across two CDs by Somm on September 27; 'The Veiled Prophet' is performed at Wexford Festival Opera on October 28 – visit wexfordopera.com

RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

The many sides of Stanford, from chamber to church music



Piano Quartet No 2

Gould Piano Trio;
David Adams *va*
Naxos (A/11)

Only performed

once in Stanford's lifetime, this unpublished, brooding work – composed in 1913 – is well worth exploring among the rich panoply of the composer's concerted chamber works.



38 Preludes

Sam Haywood *pf*
Hyperion (6/17)

This recording – featuring pieces

taken from Stanford's two sets of *Preludes in All the Keys*, Op 163 (1918) and Op 179 (1929), each containing 24 pieces – provides a splendid account of the range of inventiveness of Stanford's little-known piano works.



String Quartets – Nos 3, 4 and 7

Dante Quartet
Somm (10/18)

These virtuoso

quartets of 1896, 1906 and 1919, performed brilliantly by the Dante Quartet, reveal not only the technical demands Stanford expected from his players, but also the treasure trove of his eight works for the genre.



Mass 'Via victrix'

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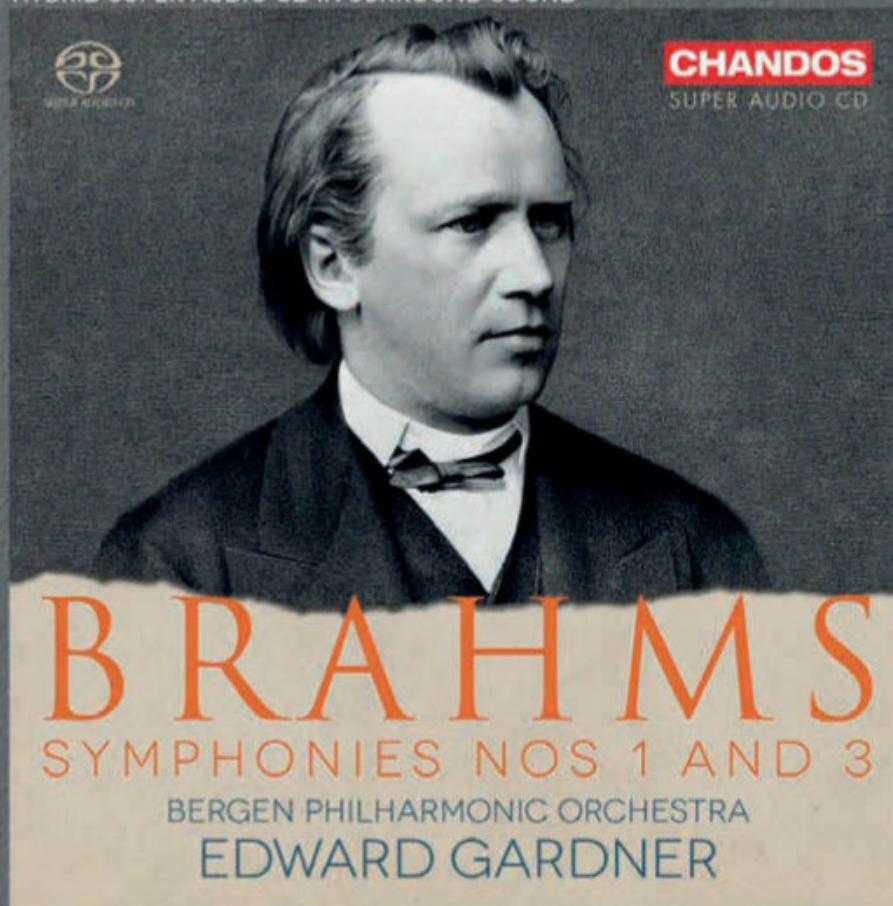
Lyrta

This represents the world premiere of Stanford's substantial 1919 Mass *Via victrix 1914-1918*, a work never before heard in its entirety, but one worthy of comparison with his choral masterpieces the Requiem, *Te Deum* and *Stabat mater*.

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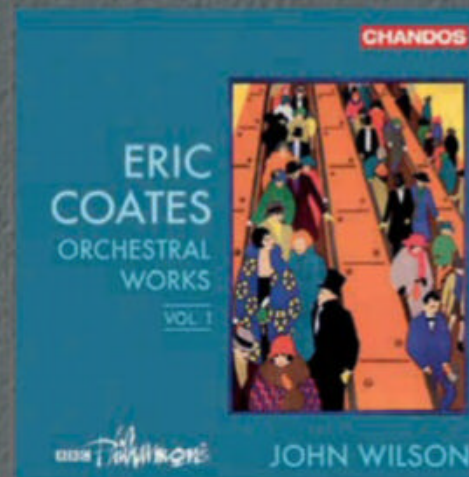


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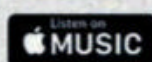


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MUSIC

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Iván Fischer's approach to Beethoven with his Budapest Festival Orchestra is one of inclusivity, innovation and liberation – and his recording of the Fifth is no exception, writes Peter Quantrill

If something is any good, it's worth waiting for. Words to live by – at least for Iván Fischer, the Budapest Festival Orchestra and Channel Classics, who have made records together for 15 years and counting. Late in January 2017 they gathered at the orchestra's purpose-built concert hall, Müpa, for three days of Beethoven: the First and Fifth Symphonies, in rehearsal, performance and recording. Only now, the best part of three years later, have the fruits of their labours been laid out.

Why the delay? No less than Fischer, his producer Jared Sacks is a busy man. Founder, managing director and lead producer of Channel Classics for almost 30 years, he also has the likes of Rachel Podger, Florilegium and the Amsterdam Sinfonietta to take care of; and in the interim, his taping of the BFO's Mahler 7 has secured another Editor's Choice in *Gramophone*. Spending a couple

of days with them all at Müpa nearly three years ago, overlooking the frozen Danube and the Rákóczy Bridge from the Pest side of the city, it is plain to see that, while time is money, they are prepared to take their time to record the signal symphony of the Classical tradition, Beethoven's Fifth. 'Iván likes to do a concert before recording a piece,' says Sacks in Müpa's basement studio. 'Everyone enjoys it, and he says, "Yeah – but it didn't go so well. Now we need to do it properly."'

Thus Fischer and his band have made it over the halfway point of what might, in time, become a Beethoven cycle to reckon with. It began with the Seventh in 2007 and continued three years later with the Fourth and the Sixth: a wonderfully sprung and mature *Pastoral* that perhaps owed its lightness of spirit to the experience of performances on tour where the principal winds played beneath the boughs of a strategically placed tree.

But then Fischer isn't in the business of completing cycles or making box-sets. Collectible though it would be, there is no 'Philips Years' compilation, beyond an authoritative (and long deleted) three-CD survey of Bartók's orchestral music. It seems likely that the Eighth will remain a missing spoke in the

wheel of Fischer's Mahler; 'He finds it bombastic,' Sacks says. 'So there's just *Das Lied von der Erde* to go.'

At the Sunday-afternoon matinée in Müpa, Fischer has another surprise up his sleeve. As the BFO fling out the triumphant opening chords of the Fifth's finale, the stage doors fly open and on troop a crowd of extras, including trumpets, flutes and fiddles, to join the throng. It makes an extraordinary *coup de théâtre* – but, as Fischer assures me after the concert, it wasn't intended as a gimmick: 'There was no other source for this idea than thinking about the piece. It's the music of a jubilant crowd. There is a similar jubilation at the end of the Ninth, but the Ninth has the chorus. It's as if,

in the Fifth, Beethoven is almost there but not quite, yet. I think it invites this idea that everyone should join in. These were not professional extras – I told my musicians that they should bring their

students and their children. For me it seems to be a very logical solution that people should rush on and join the orchestra. It's a flash mob, actually.'

The extras stayed at home, of course, when the band travelled to the US immediately after the recording sessions – but Fischer recreated the effect with conservatory students in each city they visited. 'Two of the freshest, least conventional Beethoven performances of the season at Lincoln Center this week,' it was reported. 'Music students unexpectedly rushed the stage to join them in a soaring section of the Fifth Symphony, and incognito choristers popped up among the audience members to sing the Ninth's "Ode to Joy".'

The tour almost didn't happen. Newly installed as 45th US President, Donald Trump attempted to enforce a travel ban that would have seen one of the orchestra's cellists – who is of dual Hungarian and Iranian nationality – barred from the country. Fischer wasn't having any of it. 'It struck a nerve in me,' he later told *The New York Times*, 'a very strong feeling that I will never allow anybody to single out a musician in my orchestra and disadvantage that person because of their origin,

'For me, it's a logical solution that people should rush on during the Fifth's finale and join the orchestra – it's a flash mob'

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The BFO play the Fifth at Lincoln Center in 2017, with Juilliard students joining in for the finale (inset)

skin colour, religion or any other factor.’ Calls were made, arguments pressed. A day later, dual-passport holders were exempted from the ban, and the BFO boarded their plane to New York as planned. But the incident throws a troubled light over Fischer’s heartfelt remarks to me (more of which later) about our collective need as a society to have Beethoven’s music in our lives – remarks which, nearly three years later, have gained an even greater poignancy.

‘The early music community acquired habits of superficial mannerisms ... There evolved a certain lack of deeper feelings’

On the recording, of course, you hear only the BFO, though playing with an energy to compensate for the missing extras. During the process, Fischer shuttles between hall and studio to listen to playbacks with the same easy-going efficiency he brings to his rehearsals, conducted in Hungarian with excursions into German and English. For the sessions, the orchestra are seated further back on the stage than in concert, and Fischer is a patient fanatic about the finer points of balance (‘He can tell instantly when I’ve done something,’ says Sacks): ‘Can we have

the bassoon sitting with the cellos?’ asks Fischer over the hall mikes. ‘In this hall it’s impossible for them to hear each other intonate.’

All the same, the BFO at home is a sleek, powerfully built orchestral animal, as I discover on the Monday afternoon, enjoying my own King Ludwig moment in an otherwise empty hall while they play through the Fifth’s Scherzo and finale. The energy in reserve is a far cry from the BFO’s early Hungaroton Schubert recordings; even Fischer admits that ‘probably the result now is more polished and refined. And the timing, the little liberties, are more organised after 25 years’.

Fischer has evolved with the BFO, and (to my ears) his approach to Classical-era repertoire now more happily accommodates the twin streams of his training: the old-school rigour of Hans Swarowsky’s classes in Vienna (which nurtured Mehta, Abbado and countless others) as well as luminaries of the early music movement. ‘I studied with Harnoncourt. I had a close friendship with Gustav Leonhardt and Frans Brüggen and all the pioneers, and I remember how the whole movement developed. This was in the 1970s, but something went wrong in the ’80s. The early music community started to learn habits of superficial mannerism which became the norm. There were easily recognisable traits – faster tempi, shorter notes, more accents here and there. And I think this has nothing to do with how the music was originally imagined or even practised. Also there evolved a certain lack of deeper feelings, a superficial attitude, that some people think is a Baroque style – but I don’t think that’s true.

‘When I’m reading 17th- and 18th-century history,’ continues Fischer, ‘I learn about the enthusiasm created by music, the healing power, the emotional effect. The “Miracle” Symphony by Haydn was so called after the audience sprang up and rushed to the front of the hall and so avoided the falling chandelier. I don’t see any audiences crowding to the front of the hall at the end of Haydn performances these days!’



Iván Fischer has shaped the distinctive ethos of the BFO over his several decades as its Music Director

The BFO shares both the challenges and advantages of other flexible, period-style ensembles, such as the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, that have transformed the landscape of orchestral music in the last 30 years. Fischer explains: 'I don't believe in the old style of a hundred musicians with a fixed membership, because it doesn't allow this kind of flexibility. We have a pool of musicians with an inner circle, which is fully employed, a second circle of musicians with looser contracts, and then a third for those who are only employed for certain projects. I think that the future of the orchestra in general is as a production house which can do various things – it doesn't have to be a rigid ensemble.'

'If the focus is on collective musicianship, then the Budapest Festival Orchestra is way ahead of all the other orchestras'

Symphonic chamber music has become a cliché of top-level orchestral performance but only thanks to the work of a few pioneers such as Fischer. No less than the OAE or the Chamber Orchestra of Europe (not coincidentally, he has enjoyed fruitful relationships with them both), the BFO now faces the problem of renewal. 'The difficulty with all these ensembles is that the membership doesn't evolve so fast, it doesn't have a gradual turnover. In the beginning we received just enough subsidy to give full-time work to the musicians. Then we arranged auditions for everyone, and so a lot of young people came. They were 25 years old then, and now they are 50. Maybe this is the best time for them. The majority of our members are still the

50 or so who started back then.'

Fischer casts his mind back to *Gramophone's* list of the world's top 20 orchestras, which placed the BFO ninth: the accolade still seems to mean something to him. 'But I want to discuss, what are the criteria? If the standard of the individual musicians is uppermost, then I would say the Berlin Philharmonic wins by a large margin. If beautifully balanced, fine sound is the deciding factor, then the Cleveland Orchestra wins. But if collective musicianship, and collective expression of the meaning of a piece, is the criterion, then I think the Budapest Festival Orchestra is way ahead of all the other orchestras. People here [in the BFO] become completely at one with the composition, and they share that quality with the audience. There is a deep understanding of the music itself, and I don't know any other orchestra that comes close to that.'

In a rehearsal break I sit down for a sandwich and strike up a chat with the principal viola player, Ferenc Gábor (Fischer lures him back home every now and again from the Konzerthaus Orchestra in Berlin). 'We would follow him blind,' says Gábor, and relates how much the orchestra learnt from a Beethoven cycle given jointly with the OAE and how much it enjoys the studio process: 'We turn around 180 degrees after the concert in terms of approach. And because we listen to the playbacks, then we understand what he wants for ourselves. Live and studio recordings have a completely different feel – there's no need for one to emulate or imitate the other.' But Fischer's priorities in making a recording don't necessarily align with the listeners' expectations. During rehearsal he tells his musicians how an elderly American sponsor of the BFO has complained about their recordings: 'I don't like your CDs! When I put them on in my car I have to turn the volume up and down all the time!'

Whether on CD or in concert, can we ever recover the effect of Beethoven's music upon its first audiences? 'I think we can,' replies Fischer. 'When I hear a particular chord being resolved it makes me genuinely happy. If I hear a beautiful modulation, performed beautifully, I get tears in my eyes. I don't have any problem with music having the deepest, most emotional effect on my feelings. And I get responses from people who say they share these feelings. Beethoven is one of the strongest prophets of music. He moves people and electrifies them and changes their lives. A symphony like the Fifth, which travels from deepest, darkest fate to the final liberation and jubilation, is exactly what the people of the United States need right now. Beethoven shows us how to get from one place to another.' **G**

Fischer's new Beethoven recording is released on October 11

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RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Rob Cowan submits to Christian Tetzlaff's interpretative vision and willingness to take risks, and listens afresh to violin concertos by Beethoven and Sibelius



Beethoven • Sibelius

Beethoven Violin Concerto, Op 61^a

Sibelius Violin Concerto, Op 47

Christian Tetzlaff *vn* Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Robin Ticciati

Ondine © ODE1334-2 (71' • DDD)

^aRecorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin, November 16-17, 2018

What we have here is by my calculations Christian Tetzlaff's third recording of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, the first two under Michael Gielen and David Zinman respectively. Having reviewed the latter in these pages back in June 2006, I noted then that 'the main stumbling-block on so many rival recordings of this work is a sort of romantic reverence, a trend challenged by Zehetmair, Kremer and others. For all its many moments of profound repose, Beethoven's Violin Concerto is a forthright, heroic piece, with boldly militaristic first-movement *tutti* and a rollicking finale which Tetzlaff invests with numerous added colours. Following on the heels of Zehetmair, Kremer and Schneiderhan, [he] performs the violin version of the cadenza that Beethoven wrote for his piano transcription of the work, a playful excursion and a snug fit for his overall interpretation.' This choice of cadenza has apparently been Tetzlaff's preferred option from the age of 15.

Little has changed during the intervening years, at least in principle. Listening to Tetzlaff flying side-saddle through the Concerto last



'Tetzlaff's sweet, delicately spun tone contrasts with, or should I say complements, Ticciati's occasionally bullish accompaniment'



Robin Ticciati and Christian Tetzlaff make a formidable partnership

November (when this superbly engineered recording was made at Berlin's Philharmonie), often with the utmost agility, reminded me that at the work's premiere the composer's violinist colleague Franz Clement – who was sight-reading Beethoven's hastily finished solo part – is said, by some, 'to have interrupted the concerto between the first and second movements with a solo composition of his own, played on one string of the violin held upside down'. Now do hear me out on this point. Tetzlaff may at times excitedly rushes his fences, but in collaboration with Robin Ticciati and his alert Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, he transforms aspects of what so many have treated as a sort of Holy Grail (ie loftily reverential) into a beer tankard, the sense of unhinged inebriation gaining most froth

in the outer movements' playful cadenzas, which run wild in the first movement and ratchet up extra excitement for the finale. In fact, I don't think I've ever heard a more excitable account of that closing Rondo. Here, as Tetzlaff himself says in a fascinating booklet interview, 'the seriousness or solemnity sometimes surrounding the work is [also] completely suspended'. Of course, viewed as a whole the Concerto still emerges as the mighty edifice that it is, but it's good to have a dose of typically Beethovenian rough-and-tumble thrown in as ballast.

The first movement's serene central section (played in tempo) allows for a welcome spot of repose



Utmost intensity: Christian Tetzlaff – with a fully engaged Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and Robin Ticciati – favours excitement over safety

and elsewhere Tetzlaff's sweet, delicately spun tone contrasts with, or should I say complements, Ticciati's assertive, occasionally bullish accompaniment. The *Larghetto* is beautifully done, its effect underlined through the sheer energy and character of the outer movements. There's never any doubt that what you're listening to is a real concerto, a battle of wills, more in line with Zehetmair and Brüggén (who use Wolfgang Schneiderhan's cadenza with timpani) or Kremer and Harnoncourt (a cadenza incorporating piano) than with the likes of Perlman, Zukerman or Kennedy. Who knows: maybe this is roughly what Beethoven originally had in mind? It's possible, even probable. One thing's for sure: never before has this indelible masterpiece sounded more like a profound precursor of Paganini.

If Beethoven's Concerto emerges as uncompromisingly provocative, Tetzlaff's Sibelius also errs on the side of danger. As risk-taking performances go, this one will have you clinging to the sides of your seat. Comparing it with his Virgin recording with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra under Thomas Dausgaard is especially instructive: in the finale's

opening, the ever-attentive Ticciati follows Sibelius's wishes by cueing a gradual diminuendo before Tetzlaff enters, whereas Dausgaard carries on pounding at full throttle. Then again, in the passage leading to the second subject (from around 0'44"), under Ticciati Tetzlaff sounds as if he's clinging on for dear life. Sibelius throws down the gauntlet by requesting a very fast tempo and Tetzlaff rises to the challenge. I shan't pretend that the effect is entirely comfortable (the Dausgaard option sounds marginally safer) but it's undeniably exciting. The Concerto's opening is candidly emotional, with imaginatively deployed varieties of attack (a Tetzlaff speciality) and Ticciati again engaging his soloist with the utmost intensity, lunging fearlessly at Sibelius's dynamic writing, whether the deafening growl at 7'07" or the movement's fiercely driven close. As with the Beethoven, Tetzlaff is at his lyrical best in the *Adagio*. Both performances sidestep interpretative convention without either offending or displacing their finest rivals. In many respects, a real knock-out. **G**

Beethoven – selected comparisons:

Kremer, COE, Harnoncourt

(12/93^R) (WARN) 2564 63779-2

Zehetmair, Orch of the 18th Century, Brüggén

(4/99^R) (DECC) 478 7436DC7

Tetzlaff, Zurich Tonhalle Orch, Zinman

(6/06) (ARTN) 82876 76994-2

Tetzlaff, SWF SO, Baden-Baden, Gielen

(CDA) **D** CDAG8063

Sibelius – selected comparison:

Tetzlaff, Danish Nat SO, Dausgaard

(4/03) (VIRG/ERAT) 545534-2

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Edward Seckerson hears Semyon Bychkov's Tchaikovsky Project:

'This is not an orchestra to wear its virtuosity like a badge of honour – which makes Bychkov such a good fit for them' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**



Jed Distler admires a disc of 20th-century harpsichord concertos:

'When you think you're settling into minimalist comfort zones, Michael Nyman quickly shatters your expectations' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 49**

Beethoven

'The UNESCO Beethoven Symphony No 9'
Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125

Erin Wall *sop* **Annika Schlicht** *mez* **Attilio Glaser** *ten*
René Pape *bass* **Bavarian State Youth Choir;**
Members of the Bavarian Radio Chorus; World
Orchestra for Peace; Würth Philharmonic
Orchestra / Donald Runnicles

Video director **Elisabeth Malzer**

C Major Entertainment © 749508;

© 749604 (70' + 12' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Carmen Würth Forum,
Künzelsau, Germany, November 11, 2018



A late and grand maestro sat in his dressing room, the story goes, after giving his all to another Ninth.

A composer friend of comparable age and distinction was received with the despairing plea, 'But will the people ever be united? Will they?'

It is the fate of the Ninth to bear more than its fair share of sombre contexts and lofty but impossible ideals: here, the exact centenary of the signing of the Armistice, 'when the guns fell silent'. Heartfelt speeches from the stage have been judiciously cut for the inevitable commemorative release on film.

Appeals for peace and unity in Europe may ring hollow soon enough but the performance itself bears repetition, unfailingly lucid and rhythmically sprung in the Toscanini mould. As he had done at the BBC Proms during the previous summer, Donald Runnicles observed the first but not the second half of the Scherzo's repeats in an intelligently paced reading of old-school tonal warmth, one that gathers a sense of purpose through its course.

The multinational nature of the ensemble and doubtless attenuated rehearsal time account for a few minor slips and the lack of grip to the middle movements – inviting choreographic

treatment as a sequel to *The Creatures of Prometheus* – but the payoff for their accumulating momentum arrives with a finale of admirable coherence. Sensitively phrased off with feminine endings, the cello recitative feels neither old- nor new-school but just right. The joy theme is ushered in without fussy dynamics; having blossomed to life it is capped by a noble, legato, determinedly unmilitaristic peroration. An air of Bundestag rhetoric hangs over René Pape's solo but he and his colleagues blend well, backed by a chorus that ideally mixes youth and experience. They look rather lost in a flat-ceilinged conference-hall space; but the sound-mixing places everything in perspective, as does Runnicles's unfussy direction. Not every Ninth need storm the heavens.

Peter Quantrill

Brahms • Dvořák

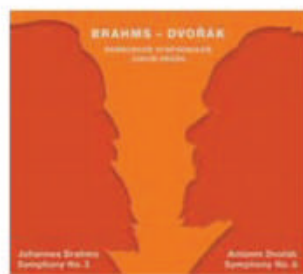
Brahms Symphony No 3, Op 90

Dvořák Symphony No 8, Op 88 B163^a

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Jakub Hrůša

Tudor © 2 TUDOR1743 (76' • DDD/DSD)

^aRecorded live at the Joseph-Keilberth-Saal,
Bamberg, February 28 – March 3, 2018



I wasn't all that enthused by the initial instalment in this series, a

pairing of Brahms's Fourth and Dvořák's Ninth Symphonies (2/19). Despite lovely playing from the Bamberg orchestra, Jakub Hrůša's interpretations came across as emotionally restricted. What a marvellous surprise, then, that this second volume satisfies in nearly every respect.

Curiously, Hrůša's accounts of both Brahms's Third and Fourth symphonies share a distinctly elegiac, restrained tone, yet in this new recording the restraint feels quintessentially – and quite touchingly – Brahmsian. There's a suppleness and sense of warm intimacy that's missing from his off-puttingly monumental reading of the

Fourth. Hrůša is also more acutely attentive to the composer's dynamic markings here – thus the opening chords are a proper *forte* (not a *fortissimo*, as one hears too often), and more crucially, *pianos* and *pianissimos* are hushed in a way that draws one in. Listen at 2'30" in the *Andante*, where the woodwinds really take the *espressivo dolce* instruction to heart, their hesitance suggesting a doleful regret, and then to the ardour the strings bring to the softly surging passage at 4'09".

Hrůša takes the third-movement *Poco allegretto* rather slowly, and his shaping of the primary melody – holding the crescendo back at the very apex of each phrase – underscores the music's intense wistfulness. I'm impressed, too, by the way he navigates the finale's volatile shifts of mood while simultaneously heightening its stark textural contrasts.

In Dvořák's Eighth, Hrůša and the Bambergers offer a wealth of felicitous detail without sacrificing energy, momentum or the continuity of the long line. Indeed, the orchestra's characterful, rhythmically vital playing is a consistent delight. How gaily the flute pipes over the viola's songful tune at 5'26" in the first movement, for instance, or try the gentle passage at 8'03" in the exquisitely coloured *Adagio*, where the Bamberg violins play so sweetly one can almost hear them smiling. A few times in the finale I thought Hrůša a little too buttoned up – the dance at 1'52" could be more boisterous, and I was disappointed that the horns' and trumpets' frenzied triplet fanfare at the end gets buried. But these are very minor blemishes on an otherwise highly enjoyable pair of recordings.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Brahms • Segerstam

Brahms Symphony No 4, Op 98

Segerstam Symphony No 295, 'uIFSÖDErBlom in Memoriam'^a

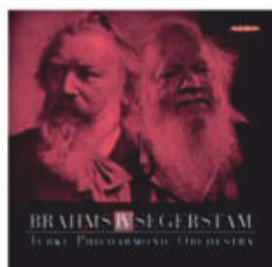
^a**Jan Söderblom** *vn* ^a**Roi Ruottinen** *vc* **Turku**

Philharmonic Orchestra / Leif Segerstam

Alba © ABCD432 (67' • DDD/DSD)



Donald Runnicles directs an unfussy and coherent Beethoven Ninth Symphony on the centenary of the signing of the Armistice



Aside from having a title like a complicated computer password (*ulFSöDErBlom in Memoriam*), Leif Segerstam's 23-minute Symphony No 295 is a positive maelstrom of colliding textures, not least the intensely dispatched solo string lines, four-note timpani taps (echoes of Ruggles and Britten), repeated piano chords and dynamics that range from ethereal quietness to riotous *fortissimos*. It surges, draws back like foot-grazing shingle (a thunder sheet and bass drum compound the stormy effect), bows to silence at the 10-minute mark then stands high again for music of even greater intensity. If ever you fancy the idea of a musical 'stream of consciousness' this is a pretty good place to start, though I confess to less than expert knowledge of its 294 predecessors.

After Segerstam's dazzling symphonic starburst, his bolt-upright Brahms Symphony No 4 came as a real surprise. I'd anticipated a rhapsodic escapade around the Brahmsian terrain, but not a bit of it. All four movements are given structure-conscious readings, the finale kept on a

tight rein tempo-wise, more so than under most other conductors save Toscanini in London pre-war. Anyone whose pulse is as steady as on Segerstam's reading has cause to celebrate. The first movement's close, with its prominent timps, makes a powerful impression, as does the punchy Scherzo. A memorable performance, then, with a brainteasing booklet note that makes James Joyce read like Enid Blyton.

Rob Cowan

Dvořák · Copland · Ives

Copland Quiet City Dvořák Symphony No 9, 'From the New World', Op 95 B178 Ives 'Holidays' Symphony - Washington's Birthday

Solistes Européens Luxembourg /

Christoph König

Rubicon © RCD1037 (60' • DDD)



of authentic Americana – one rural, one urban – from perhaps her most famous sons: Ives and Copland. But that's about as far as my enthusiasm for this disc goes, I'm afraid.

It's a neat idea framing Dvořák's ubiquitous *New World* with two miniatures

Misgivings quickly surfaced during the first of the New World offerings as Ives's postcard from New Fairfield on the occasion of George Washington's birthday came sharply into focus. The impressionistic winter chill sits icily enough at the start but once we repair to the barn dance, the Jew's harp twanging out a rhythm of sorts for the awkward footwork, it's as if conductor Christoph König is hell bent on finding order in the chaos, of tidying up the jamboree so that some semblance of decorum remains. It's all so very clean. The old sentimental melodies drift by at the close but even the final nod to 'Goodnight ladies' lacks a certain irony.

It is, though, the perfect segue into the opening page of the Dvořák symphony. There is a fireside cosiness about that, a sense of the music being scaled down. And what follows is pristine to a fault – neat and tidy, refined and polite, and quite bloodless. The slow movement only becomes emotionally engaging when solo strings feature in the closing bars. Suddenly we have an inkling of where the reading lives. For the rest, a feeling of objectivity, of detachment, prevails.

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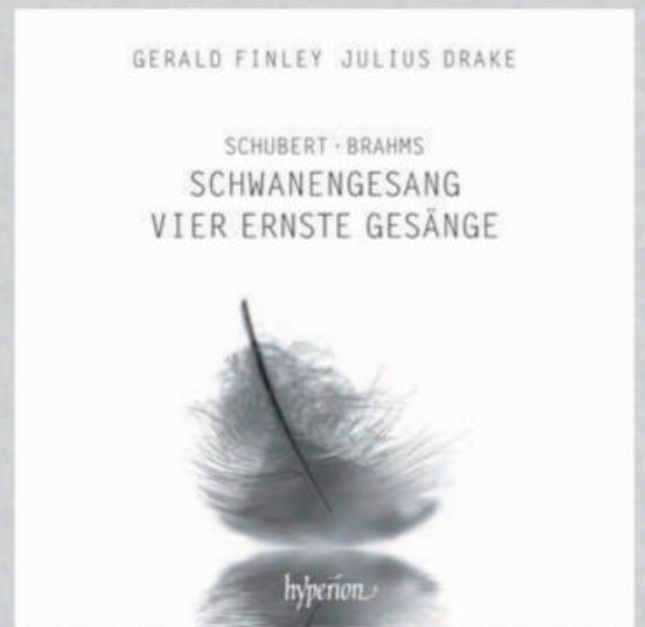
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Accutely attentive: Jakub Hrůša directs the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra in satisfying accounts of Brahms and Dvořák – see review on page 40

It's difficult writing about performances whose shortcomings are easy to recognise but hard to define – and perhaps that's it: there is no defining character about König's reading. That big tremolando moment at the close of the Scherzo, for instance, should open up a sudden and surprising vista before us. But it's just a tremolando. The scale of the moment is diminished. And surging (as we should but don't here) into the finale – hardly my idea of *con fuoco* – we are never really and truly on the edge of our seats. Sorry, but it just isn't exciting.

Copland's *Quiet City* throws up a subliminal 'connection' with the cor anglais-led slow movement of the Dvořák but if your volume is set satisfactorily for the Dvořák, the close-up focusing of the Copland makes everything sound too loud – there isn't that inherent mysticism and ear-pricking Hopperesque magic. Lovely trumpet-playing from the Solistes Européens Luxembourg's (uncredited) principal, gently invoking the composer's jazzier brother, but it's a flash of personality that is sadly lacking elsewhere. **Edward Seckerson**

Glass

A Descent into the Maelstrom

(arr Aleksander Waaktaar)

Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra / Tim Weiss

Orange Mountain © OMM0140 (60' • DDD)



Among the most prolific of composers today, Philip Glass also has never been averse to the rearranging of his scores for different media, while often encouraging others to do similarly. Hence his version of *A Descent into the Maelstrom*, conceived during 1986 as the music for a dance adaptation of the story by Edgar Allan Poe and latterly recorded by the Philip Glass Ensemble. On to the present, and Norwegian director Jan Vardøen encountered this recording when planning a film on Poe's text, duly commissioning the composer Aleksander Waaktaar to arrange the original score for the Arctic Philharmonic as a soundtrack for his own project.

The result is consummately professional and entirely predictable in its adhering to the spirit of Glass's score, not least through the addition of (wordless) soprano and synthesisers to open out the orchestral textures. Waaktaar has retained the original's division into 18 continuous sections, and these can be heard as merging into larger groups (or movements) according to the evolution of the film. The playing of the Arctic PO is fully attuned to those hallmarks of the Glass idiom, as also is Tim Weiss in his control over the undulating ebb and flow of this music – enhanced by a suitably spacious sound balance that underlines the widescreen aura.

Comparison with that PGE recording (among the first releases on Glass's Orange Mountain Music label) also confirms the incremental nature of Waaktaar's approach. An effective and appealing rethink, but 'a dramatic new interpretation of a major Philip Glass work'? Hardly.

Richard Whitehouse

Comparative version:


Philip Glass Ens, Riesman (OMM) OMM0005

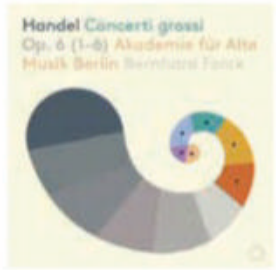
Handel

Concerti grossi, Op 6 - Nos 1-6 HWV319-324

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin /

Bernhard Forck *vn*

Pentatone  PTC5186 737 (73' • DDD/DSD)



Now recording for Pentatone after 25 years with Harmonia Mundi, the

AAM Berlin mark the occasion with the first six of Handel's 'Twelve Grand Concertos', his second set, published in 1740. Nos 7-12 are due to follow, with the six Op 3s after that. It seems like a long time to have got round to such core Baroque orchestral repertoire, but perhaps it has been missing from their discography because of the presence on Harmonia Mundi of the 'other' AAM, the English one, who made a point of recording all of Handel's opus numbers.

A welcome sight, then, and needless to say the playing is good, delivering exciting quick movements and some full-toned slower ones (the openings of Nos 1 and 2 are both suavely drawn out), even if ensemble is not always as sharp as it might be. Handel's optional parts for oboes and bassoon are used for Nos 1, 2, 5 and 6, but whereas in the English Concert's recording (Archiv, 11/82) they add extra definition to an already clean-lined texture, here they run the danger of loading it down and murking it, all the more noticeably so when compared with the sprightlier, strings-only Nos 3 and 4. The two solo violins play with keen silvery sound, however.

As far as interpretation goes, it is essentially conventional. First violin Bernhard Forck is named as concertmaster, but this feels like a typically collaborative AAMB effort. The nicest surprise is the brisk approach to the Musette in No 6, which can be quite a wallow in some hands. Some listeners may prefer it that way, as well as a greater sense of contrast for the more animated middle section, but it is really rather charming all the same. Dynamic contrasts are well used elsewhere, including some jokily swapped-round ones in the repeats of the finale of No 6. All this serves the music handsomely enough, but if sparky personality is what you want (and you don't crave the wind parts), Andrew Manze and the other AAM from 1998 may be more your thing. **Lindsay Kemp**

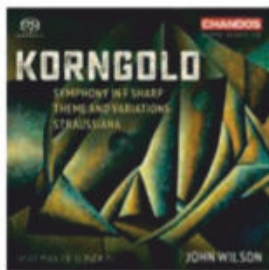
Korngold

Straussiana. Symphony, Op 40.

Theme and Variations, Op 42

Sinfonia of London / John Wilson

Chandos  CHSA5220 (59' • DDD/DSD)



Rumours have been circling for a while of a hush-hush project from John Wilson;

of a new super-orchestra hand-picked from the cream of the UK's orchestral players. Now here it is: a radiant new recording of Korngold's orchestral music with an all-new Sinfonia of London, led by Andrew Haveron.

And? Well, for starters, put aside any expectation of the Technicolor studio sound that Wilson draws from his other orchestra (the one that carries his name). Wilson has always been clear that he's interested primarily in the appropriate colour for any given repertoire, and for this Austrian-American exile symphony he evokes a great post-war US orchestra – the weighty, satin string tone, the skyscraping brass and questioning woodwinds that you might find on a 1950s Chicago or Philadelphia disc, though Chandos captures a much mellower general ambience.

And then Wilson runs with it, in one of the most athletic performances of this symphony on record – closer in spirit to Kempe than Previn, but considerably faster than either (even without Kempe's cuts). Rhythms are springy and purposeful; the great *Adagio* really strives, as well as sings, and I've rarely heard it probe deeper. Every phrase speaks; textures are translucent and detailed (even at the dizzying speed of the Scherzo), and the string sound glows from within, with portamento very much at the service of expression. Wilson clearly sees Korngold's Symphony (rightly) as part of the Viennese classical tradition.

The result is both gripping and sincerely moving; and the two short, sad-sweet late works that follow the symphony – written by Korngold for amateur orchestras – receive the same whole-hearted commitment and loving care for colour and style. Stirring, thought-provoking and superbly played, this disc is a tonic. Let's hope it's not a one-off.

Richard Bratby

Symphony – selected comparisons:

Munich PO, Kempe (8/74^R, 6/92) (VARE) VSD5346

LSO, Previn (8/97) (DG) 453 436-2GH

Locatelli • Nante

'Le fil d'Ariane'

Locatelli Concerti grossi – Op 1 No 11; Op 4 No 7.

Introduzione teatrale, Op 4 No 2. Il pianto

d'Arianna. Sinfonia funebre Nante Arianna

Le Concert Idéal / Marianne Piketty *vn*

Evidence  EVCD053 (66' • DDD)



On paper, this album really shouldn't work: the concerti grossi of the

Italian Baroque composer Pietro Antonio Locatelli interspersed with movements by Alex Nante, an Argentinian composer born in 1992. Even the album cover, chocolate box-like in its golden swirls and streamlined font, urged me to believe that this would be nothing more than an interesting miscellany of musical morsels. I was, as ever, prepared to be wrong and indeed I was: this is an album of joyful synthesis and occasional genius, a thoughtful experiment in threading together the old and the new.


The Locatelli performances by Le Concert Idéal under the direction of Marianne Piketty on the violin are refined. The Gigue from the Concerto Op 1 No 11 is steely in precision, while the *Andante* of Op 4 No 7 is flirtatious, teasing out long phrases with sweet sighing figures, cut short only by rumbustious unison chords, a mutiny that intensifies into snap pizzicato out for blood. When juxtaposed with the Nante, however, some of the Locatelli movements are noticeably bland. Tempos err towards the safe; ornamentation is occasionally predictable.

The most remarkable moments on the disc are when Locatelli morphs into Nante – or, to be more precise, when Nante mimics Locatelli's musical language then melts it down to rebuild from its molten remains. Nante's 'Paspié' is gorgeously deceptive: only as chromaticism creeps in, and diatonicism disintegrates into dissonant chaos – and Ariadne's thread emerges as an embroidered arioso for solo violin – do we realise that this is not Locatelli but the mesmeric writing of the Paris-trained twenty-something. These moments of trickery aren't just clever, they're also seductive. We, the listener, begin to desire the next disintegration, the next musical breakdown. So when Nante's 'Giga' almost instantaneously self-destructs and the discipline of canon becomes anarchy, it is as if we have caused it. This is powerful stuff, and Le Concert Idéal bring to it the zeal it so very much deserves. **Mark Seow**

Mahler

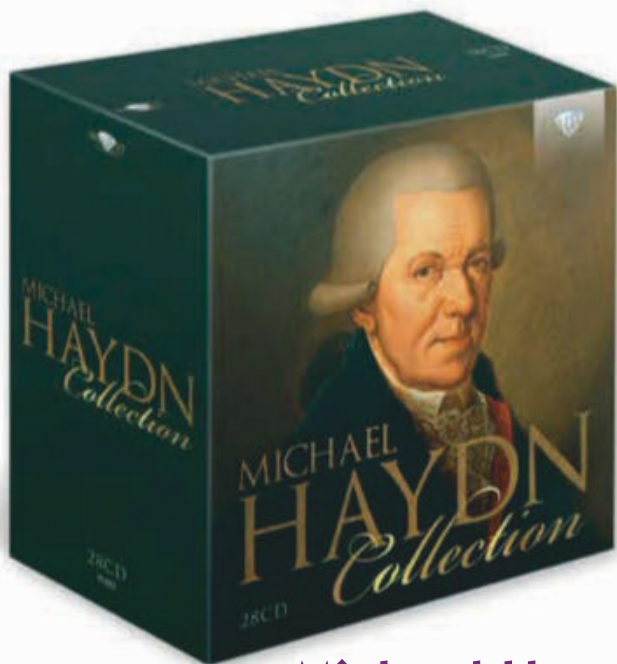
Symphony No 1

Minnesota Orchestra / Osmo Vänskä

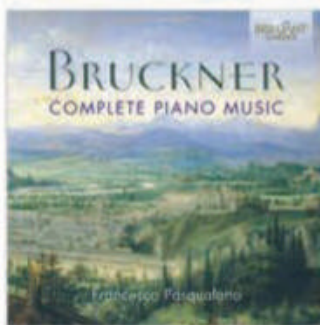
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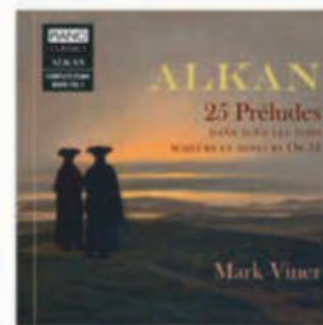
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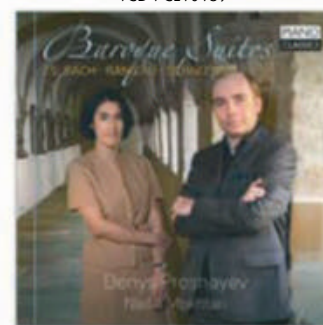
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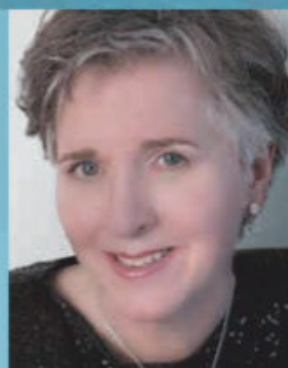
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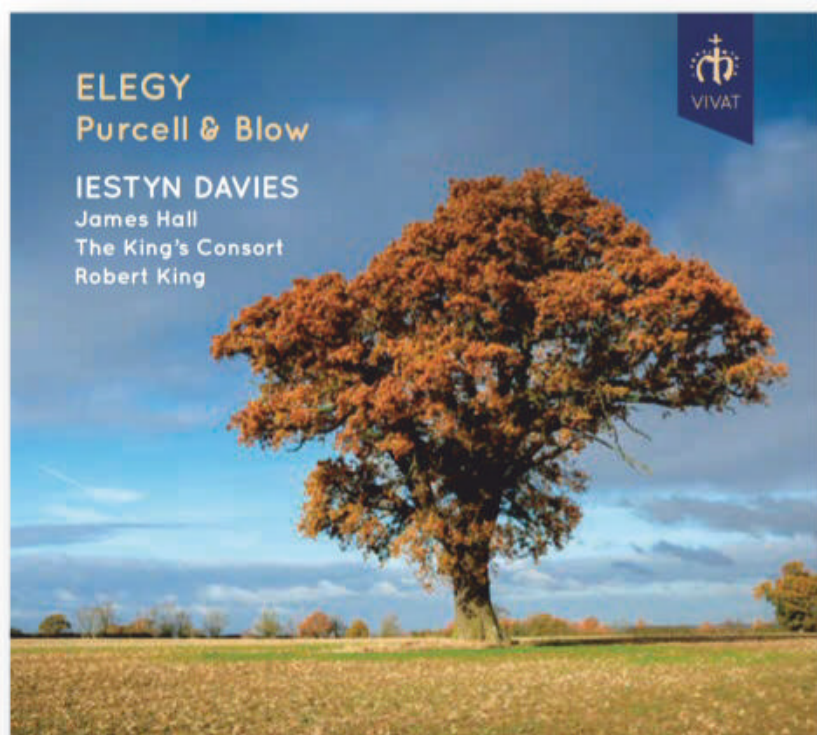
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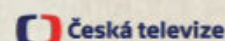
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It may well be that more of the score is audible here than ever before. What's lacking is less easily defined. Vänskä is not the first conductor to prize textual clarity over the lazier approach of Mitteleuropa. If his first movement is often surprisingly stately, disinclined to let rip lest some dot or comma be less than faithfully conveyed, the second is so crisply enunciated that the music loses its smile. That this is a deliberate tactic in the Scherzo material is confirmed by the subtle characterisation of the central Trio, the nostalgia palpable in sliding strings and finely etched winds. The return strikes me as implausibly brusque but you may hear things differently: such playing is mightily impressive in its own way.

The quiriness continues when the ambivalent funeral march is launched by a sectional rather than individual solo for the double basses. The suggestion in Jeremy Barham's booklet note that this controversy 'seems to have been settled' will surely not go uncontested by *Gramophone* readers. What follows feels conscientious rather than natural, the calculation a little obvious. (Or was I being influenced by the excessive smoothness at the start?) The finale banishes doubts for a time, thanks to the devastating ferocity with which the players tear into its opening section. Lyrical elements, pristinely beautiful, are short on heartbreak. Throughout the sense of direction is sure, the sense of theatre ultimately less so. The Minnesota Orchestra play out of their skin but you may be disturbed by the tendency to take a surgical scalpel to the body of sound.

Working with a forest of mikes, Robert Suff's production team once again elicit surround sound of remarkable clarity without betraying the spacious acoustic of Orchestra Hall, Minneapolis. The dynamic range is vast. And for investors in physical format, BIS's packaging is now irreproachably green. That said, even recent competition is intense: François-Xavier Roth (Harmonia Mundi, 6/19) posits a five-movement *Titan* incorporating the discarded 'Blumine', while Adám Fischer (AVI-Music, 4/18) seeks to impress with a wealth of affectionate detail in the conventional edition. Vänskä, disinclined to over-egg the pudding, eschews the additional timpani stroke with which many recordings embellish the finale's parting shot. What's missing en route is a certain geniality. **David Gutman**

Myaskovsky

Symphonies - No 1; No 13
Ural Youth Symphony Orchestra /
Alexander Rudin
Naxos © 8 573988 (58' • DDD)



Alexander Rudin, a distinguished exponent of Myaskovsky's Cello Concerto and his sonatas for the same instrument (Cello Classics), is also a pedagogue and conductor. Here he pairs Myaskovsky's first symphonic utterance (in which Tchaikovsky's *Manfred*, Scriabin's *Divine Poem* and Glazunov's Eighth Symphony loom as large as might be expected in St Petersburg, 1908) with perhaps the most personal of his cycle of 27. Not that the Thirteenth has much truck with the Cello Concerto's vein of nostalgic regret, representing rather the last gasp of Myaskovsky's alternative, 'modernist' line of development.

It may or may not be fanciful to interpret this symphony as an evocation of the composer's depressive state of mind in the early 1930s. Initially subdued, the music rouses itself sufficiently to suggest its creator banging his head against the brick wall of incipient Stalinist repression. Or are we overlooking his own deep well of personal loneliness? Repurposing elements drawn from Stravinsky and Berg, Myaskovsky offers intangible rather than strenuous despair, developing a discreet idiom of paradoxes and half lights like some attenuated fusion of late Schnittke and Arnold Bax. In modern times some distinguished names have shown interest in the score, including Tadaaki Otaka, Oliver Knussen and Leon Botstein. There is just one deeply felt commercial disc from Yevgeny Svetlanov, latterly presented as part of his complete symphony cycle (Warner, 10/08). In rejecting excessive languor without entirely short-circuiting the music's inconsolable emotional trajectory, Rudin exposes more clearly its motivic workings and unlikely stylistic roots.

Tauter speeds and lighter textures are not quite so helpful in the longer, more accessible companion piece (as revised in 1921), the strings at times more reliably tuned than the winds. But this is nit-picking. The Ural Youth Symphony Orchestra, not to be confused with the longer-established Ural Academic Philharmonic Orchestra of Dmitry Lyss, has only been in existence since 2007. For music-making of an older, more potent

vintage, it's worth looking beyond the aforementioned Svetlanov set to Gennady Rozhdestvensky's USSR Ministry of Culture State Symphony Orchestra, ablaze in No 1 (Russian Disc, 3/94 – nla). That said, with crisper sound and a helpful booklet note from Richard Whitehouse, the present release is certainly worth a punt. **David Gutman**

Stanford

Fairy Day^a. Overture in the Style of a Tragedy. A Song of Agincourt. Verdun. A Welcome March
^aCodetta; Ulster Orchestra / Howard Shelley
Hyperion © CDA68283 (66' • DDD)



Completed in December 1903, Stanford's impressive *Overture in the Style of a Tragedy* had to wait nearly 107 years for its premiere, which was given in Belfast by the Ulster Orchestra under Kenneth Montgomery. As annotator Jeremy Dibble rightly observes, the towering example of Brahms's *Tragic Overture* looms large over the musical landscape – and there's also a rewarding sense of harmonic adventure in this tautly argued essay that put me in mind of Dvořák (and his powerful concert overture *Othello* in particular). Written just five months previously to mark the state visit to Ireland by King Edward VII, *A Welcome March* turns out to be an enjoyably breezy cousin to Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance*, and it's preceded by the imposing diptych *Verdun: Solemn March and Heroic Epilogue*, Stanford's orchestral reworking of the last two movements from the second of his five organ sonatas. Finished in August 1917 and inscribed 'To Monsieur Charles Marie Widor and the Great Country to which he belongs', this rousing music comprehensively – and cleverly – incorporates elements of the Marseillaise.

Utterly different again is *Fairy Day*: Published by Stainer & Bell in 1913 under the title of 'Three Idylls for Female Chorus and Small Orchestra', these wholly charming, enchantingly fragrant and highly evocative settings of poetry by William Allingham (1824-89) are fashioned with breathtaking skill and beauty, the vocal writing garbed with exquisite delicacy by a chamber orchestra. Although dedicated to (and in all likelihood commissioned by) Victor Harris and his New York-based St Cecilia Chorus, there's no evidence this lovely score was ever actually programmed by him at one of their regular concerts at the Waldorf Astoria in Manhattan.

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

THE TCHAIKOVSKY PROJECT

Edward Seckerson immerses himself in Semyon Bychkov's Tchaikovsky, including the complete symphonies and piano concertos



Contained emotion: Semyon Bychkov brings a consistency of vision to Tchaikovsky

Tchaikovsky

'The Tchaikovsky Project'

Complete Symphonies. Manfred, Op 58.

Complete Piano Concertos^a. Francesca da Rimini, Op 32. Romeo and Juliet.

Serenade for Strings, Op 48

^aKirill Gerstein *pf* Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / Semyon Bychkov

Decca © 7 483 4942DX7 (7h 18' • DDD)

Symphony No 6, Romeo and Juliet from

483 0656DH (10/16); Manfred from

483 2320DH (A/17)



Now we have the complete portrait, as it were, of Tchaikovsky

through the eyes of Semyon Bychkov, many of the issues I addressed when reviewing the original releases of the *Pathétique* and *Manfred* Symphonies are thrown into high relief. There is

a consistency of vision and scale here that may not be to everyone's taste – thrill-seekers and those clinging to a more extravagant view of the Tchaikovsky symphonies will surely be disappointed – but anyone who remains fascinated by the composer's ability to plot and maintain a sure and steady course between the Classical and the Romantic will find much to savour here. There is charm and beauty aplenty, and a self-evident 'connection' with the music. But, equally, an emotional restraint.

Under Bychkov the emotion is always 'contained' – contained until it can be contained no more, as in the great development section of the *Pathétique's* first movement: a controlled panic attack which I described in my original review as 'classical in form, neurotic in nature'. With Bychkov you are never in doubt as to where Tchaikovsky places the moment of climax – in the case of the *Pathétique* development, the mighty

sostenuto passage for strings answered in breast-beating trombones. But for more in the way of histrionics, for a performance taking us closer to, if not over the edge, you need to turn to Teodor Currentzis and his MusicAeterna (Sony Classical, 1/18). And so it is here throughout the later symphonies and pieces like *Francesca da Rimini*, which never boldly goes where Stokowski or Bernstein (Israel PO not NYPO) hellishly go. You don't turn to this set for sonic thrills.

But equally you are never left in doubt as to Bychkov's deep affection, indeed love, for this music, and in the Czech Philharmonic he has found an orchestra with roots in that precious Austro-Hungarian tradition which in its respect for the music's classical elegance enables Bychkov to take a fresh perspective on it. The Czech sound is abundantly warm and inviting but modest and unflashy in colour, cast and delivery. It's the kind of playing that frees the music to do its embraceable thing. I'm thinking immediately of the cellos taking up the evocative horn theme in the second movement of the First Symphony, *Winter Daydreams*, a performance at once homespun and personal – daydreams enjoyed from the warmth of the fireside or through the rustic primitivism of an old woodcut. Private, not public. Those burgeoning horns at the central climax are hardly a widescreen spectacle but what they give us is entirely in context to the reading as a whole.

This cycle does not trade in brilliance, in conspicuous virtuosity for its own sake or what might be called the imperial splendour of Tchaikovsky's music. In a way the subtitle of *Little Russian* for the Second Symphony typifies Tchaikovsky's own modesty and restraint. This piece is a miniature at heart and has the air of the *divertissement* about it. It's piquant, eminently balletic. Even the finale – which opens like an allusion to Mussorgsky's 'Great Gate' – quickly turns to Mozartian playfulness. A single tam-tam stroke brings us back to Mussorgsky but again it's a jolly piccolo who leads the procession through that Great Gate.

Bychkov has really enhanced my appreciation of the Third Symphony, the *Polish*, where, like those delightful character dances from the great ballets, an unforced delight in the music is all

that is required to unlock the charm. The phrasing from Bychkov's Czech Philharmonic is all so effortless, the second-movement waltz and the ensuing *Andante elegiaco* 'sung' in such a way as to sound familiar and much loved even at first hearing.

My suggestion there that the best thing about these performances is the sense that the pieces are somehow revealed in the phrasing of them is particularly evident with the Fourth. The passion is in the imperative of the musical argument; the choices feel right, with every transition inevitable but not predictable. It's all of a piece. And, as throughout this set, it's Tchaikovsky's lyric invention that scores time and again – songful, graceful, balletic. The beauty of the playing lies in its all-pervasive honesty, the way the sound always relates to the phrasing, the way that there is always a clear musical reason for every sound, every gesture. This is not an orchestra to wear its virtuosity like a badge of honour – which makes Bychkov (as with Jiří Bělohlávek before him) such a good fit for them.

That said, the missing dimension here is (to use a word elusive in meaning) 'temperament'. The music is full of it and in performances like that of the Fifth Symphony I don't always feel it. Even without Yevgeny Mravinsky's celebrated (notorious?) rubatos, there is a potency about his famous later recording with the Leningrad Philharmonic which has one on the edge of one's seat. We all want more in the way of fireworks from this piece nowadays, don't we? Not here.

The set also includes the three piano concertos (including the original version of the epic and much-underrated Second) and, in choosing Kirill Gerstein to record them, Bychkov is further endorsing his manifesto for this music. Gerstein gives us the original 1879 version of the First Concerto, which begins with the celebrated chords at the outset arpeggiated for a lighter effect. Thereafter the pianist goes out of his way (and I think slightly self-consciously) to promote a more lyric – he says 'Schumannesque' – view of the piece, conspicuously eschewing bombast and showmanship. Sorry, but I miss the adrenalin rush when the virtuoso elements we know and love are bigged up. There, I've said it. **G**

Bringing up the rear is *A Song of Agincourt* (1918, revised the following year), a strikingly inventive and often nobly affecting tribute to those Royal College of Music members (a number of them pupils of Stanford) who served and perished in the Great War, and whose treatment of the 15th-century 'Agincourt Hymn' intriguingly anticipates Walton's in his marvellous score for Laurence Olivier's big-screen adaptation of Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1944).

Suffice to say, these splendidly prepared and finely engineered performances under Howard Shelley's clear-headed direction do full justice to some appealing, off-the-beaten-track repertoire, and the disc as a whole is well worth seeking out.

Andrew Achenbach

Tabakov

'Complete Symphonies, Vol 4'

Double Bass Concerto^a. Symphony No 5^b

^aEntcho Radoukanov *db* **Symphony Orchestra**

of Bulgarian National Radio / Emil Tabakov

Toccata Classics © TOCC0530 (75' • DDD)

Recorded ^a1982, ^b2011



Outside his native Bulgaria, Emil Tabakov (b1947) is perhaps best

known for his recordings with the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra in the 1980s and '90s, including a cycle of the Mahler symphonies for Capriccio (3/97). However, Tabakov is also a productive composer, with 10 symphonies, two ballets, a series of concertos and a number of chamber and choral works to his name.

The Double Bass Concerto was composed in 1975 to fulfil the graduation requirements of Tabakov's composition course at the Bulgarian Conservatoire, his earlier studies at the Bulgarian State Academy of Music having encompassed composition, conducting and double bass. With its repeating rhythmic patterns and shrieking woodwind, the first movement lives somewhat in the shadow of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto. The second movement, by contrast, presents a sparsely textured nocturnal landscape over which the double bass muses in a high register, occasionally interrupted by discordant and menacing sounds from elsewhere in the orchestra. The third movement provides a fast and exciting conclusion, with particularly effective writing for percussion. The performance by Entcho Radoukanov, for many years the principal double bass

of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, is splendidly vivid, and the studio recording from 1982 is very fine. Altogether a worthy addition to the 20th-century double bass repertoire comparable with concertos by Skalkottas, Henze and Aho.

The Fifth Symphony, completed in 2000 and premiered the same year, is a somewhat thornier proposition. The darkly propulsive outer movements, suggestive of war or tragedy, proceed with an unremitting, oppressive intensity, and a similar bleakness of mood pervades both the second-movement *Largo* and the sardonic Mahler-meets-Shostakovich march-like third movement. With its relatively limited variegation of mood and dynamics, and a running time of 54 minutes, it's a symphony that requires considerable endurance from the listener without necessarily repaying the effort involved. There's no doubting, however, the commitment of the orchestral playing under Tabakov in this 2011 recording.

Christian Hoskins

'20th-Century Harpsichord Concertos'

Kalabis Harpsichord Concerto, Op 42 Leigh

Concertino Nyman Harpsichord Concerto

Roem Concertino da camera

Jory Vinikour *hpd*

Chicago Philharmonic Orchestra / Scott Speck

Cedille © CDR90000 188 (75' • DDD)



If you're looking for compelling contemporary harpsichord

concertos beyond the usual suspects (Falla, Poulenc, Martinů) in outstanding, superbly engineered performances, this disc is for you, and for any serious music lover at that.

Although Walter Leigh's charming and joyfully contrapuntal Concertino has seen several fine recordings (Neville Dilkes – EMI/Warner, 4/72 – and the pioneering Decca 78s with Kathleen Long on piano – Dutton, 6/48, 11/01), the present version boasts superior soloist/ensemble rapport in regard to Jory Vinikour's crisp articulation and the finesse of the Chicago Philharmonic's string section under Scott Speck. In moments when you think you're settling into minimalist comfort zones, Michael Nyman's Harpsichord Concerto quickly shatters your expectations as he steers rhythmic patterns in different directions or abruptly changes the mood and the subject (the declamatory unison string



Exciting and vibrant: Jory Vinikour brings personality and flair to 20th-century harpsichord concertos

melody at 1'22" in the fourth section). While an air of authenticity unquestionably permeates the composer-led premiere recording featuring the late Elisabeth Chojnacka as soloist (EMI/Warner, 11/97), Vinikour and Speck deliver more exciting and vibrant results all around. Interestingly, Ned Rorem's early and recently rediscovered 1947 Concertino (recorded for the first time here) holds more interest for its diverse instrumentation (the imaginative trumpet licks, for example) than for its relatively notey and anonymous harpsichord-writing.

Viktor Kalabis's three-movement 1974-75 Concerto (written for his wife, the legendary Zuzana Růžicková) is the disc's most substantial and serious work, showcasing the harpsichord's textural scope to extremes, from the *Allegro vivo*'s relentless toccata-like patterns to the central slow movement's long lines with slow repeated notes. Also note how the first-movement cadenza makes striking use of sparse passagework and silences. Vinikour and Speck obviously revel in Kalabis's colourful scoring, abetted by the engineering's vivid detailing. Some collectors, however, might favour the distant perspective and transparent

lightness of Růžicková's 1980 recording with the Prague Chamber Orchestra (Supraphon, 7/13), which benefits from a slightly faster, more animated finale.

Vinikour's booklet notes discuss the music extensively and include personal reflections about the composers and the performers associated with these four works, along with a moving dedication to the memory of Kalabis and Růžicková, who must be beaming with pride, wherever they are. **Jed Distler**

'Bach & Co'

JS Bach Violin Concertos - BWV1041; BWV1056R

Fasch Concerto for Violin and Oboe, WV L:24

C Förster Violin Concerto in G minor **Graun**

Concerto for Violin and Recorder, Cv:XIII:96

Heinichen Concerto for Violin and Oboe, S240

Telemann Concertos - for Two Violins,

TWV52:C2; for Violin and Traverso, TWV52:e3

Les Accents / Thibault Noally

Aparté © AP206 (70' • DDD)



If you regard yourself as a fairly seasoned and knowledgeable listener of Baroque music,

then you may find the premise of 'Bach & Co' a slightly outdated one: that many people today believe Bach to have been the only outstanding composer of his time, whereas in fact Bach himself thought highly of his contemporaries and copied, arranged and performed their compositions. We're even informed that 'Georg Philipp Telemann is now gradually becoming much better known'.

Still, focus instead on the charmingly performed, multi-composer programme containing a nice balance of the familiar (Bach's A minor Violin Concerto and JG Graun's Concerto in C for violin and recorder) and the slightly less so, and there's plenty to recommend about this disc. In fact, I'll begin with the work which really none of us will have heard, because it's a world-premiere recording: a skillfully written, *galant*-style Violin Concerto in G minor by one of the album's genuinely still-obscure names, practising lawyer turned composer Christoph Förster, who as a violinist led the Sachsen-Merseburg Hofkapelle after the departure of Graun in 1732. This is sprightly in the outer movements – the opening *Andante* coloured by major-key interludes, before the *Allegro* finale flips

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The Deutsches Kammerakademie Neuss champion little-known symphonies by Gossec

Haydn earned the title ‘Father of the Symphony’ not through his invention of the form but through becoming the master of its first maturity, exploring the possibilities offered by an orchestra over three or four movements. In reality he took an already existing style and built on the framework already marked out by characters such as the Mannheim Kapellmeister **Johann Stamitz**, who built his ensemble into one of the finest in Europe and contributed almost 60 symphonies to its repertoire before his death aged 39 in 1757 – supposedly the year Haydn composed his first symphony.

Stamitz’s symphonies are not new to disc and Naxos is one of the labels that has helped disseminate his music. A new recording presents five of the six Op 3 Symphonies (the label released No 2 a quarter of a century ago) in bright, well-prepared performances by the Musica Viva Moscow Chamber Orchestra. The longest is the four-movement Third in G (almost 14 minutes), the shortest the three-movement Fourth in E flat (just over eight). Don’t expect Haydnesque wit or too much Mozartian lyricism: these are far terser affairs, presenting motifs dependent far more on rhythm and figuration than on memorable melody, but doing so with confidence and some virtuosity. Oboes lend colour to violin lines and horns are clearly fresh from the hunt, while slow movements are for strings only. A harpsichord offers gentle

support. In truth, we’re still in the world of the Italian opera overture – the developmental style of symphonic writing has yet to emerge fully. Stamitz marshals his material with panache, though, and Op 3 is revealed as a bit of a charmer.

Clarinets arrived early at Mannheim, where they notoriously caught the ear of the young(ish) Mozart. Johann Stamitz wrote a concerto for the instrument, thought by some to be the first such work, but his son **Carl Stamitz** really caught the bug and composed no fewer than 10. Paul Meyer offers first recordings of three of them, all in B flat and clearly composed for a virtuoso on the instrument. Stamitz *filis*’ musical language is not noticeably different from his father’s, although themes are longer-breathed and unfold at a more leisurely pace. All the clarinet tricks are here, from leaps across wide intervals to fingery passagework and lyric lines in the singing mid-range of the instrument. The Kurpfälzisches Kammerorchester, dedicated to performing the music of the Mannheim School, sounds to be a smaller band than the Russians and is recorded a touch more closely (without harpsichord). Concerto No 5 is perhaps the highlight, with a central *Andante* in which the soloist alternates with mellifluous oboes in thirds, and an *allemande* finale of irresistible lightness.

François-Joseph Gossec was another prolific contributor to the early symphonic repertoire. A sometime

friend of Mozart, he composed a Requiem that audibly influenced the Salzburger in 1791; but, at the other end of Mozart’s life, Gossec was already publishing sets of symphonies, the second of which, Op 4, appeared around 1758. All in four movements, these works display the nervy energy characteristic of Haydn; and it is interesting that Gossec’s production of symphonies tailed off in the 1780s, just as Haydn’s music was enjoying its peak of popularity in Gossec’s Paris. The E major Symphony, Op 4 No 5, is designated *Pastorella* and makes use of suitably rustic drones in the Minuet and beguilingly winding string lines in the *Adagio*. Elsewhere, finales are all super-fast (mainly marked *presto*) and the slower of the slow movements (*adagio* rather than *andante*) achieve a greater depth than is often the case in the 1750s. No 6 in D minor even introduces a note of proto-*Sturm und Drang*. All six works are played with affection by the Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss.

A number of composers called Rösler emerged from Prague during the 18th century. The most famous of them more commonly went under the name Rosetti, further confusing matters: working out which one is meant when a manuscript or printed edition simply says ‘Rösler’ continues to keep musicologists scratching their heads. **Johann Joseph Rösler** (1771–1812) was mainly active in Prague but was resident in Vienna early in the 19th century, where he clearly came under the influence of Beethoven, if a recently identified Symphony in C is anything to go by. It may contain a Minuet instead of a scherzo but the muscular orchestration clearly leans closer to Beethoven than to Mozart or Haydn. Perhaps only that familiar sense of fateful inevitability that is crucial to Beethoven is missing. A Piano Concerto in E flat, on the other hand, is clearly of the Mozart school, not least in its chaste central *Andantino* and closing *Allegretto*. Alena Hönigová plays a roughly contemporary Walter fortepiano. The Orchester Eisenberg are recorded in a pretty Czech church but from some distance, resulting in *tuttis* having less impact than they might. Nevertheless, it will be worth hearing more from Rösler and his advocates, and from the new Basel-based Koramant label.

Friedrich Schneider (1786–1853) also boasted a Beethoven connection, for it was he who conducted what is thought to have been the public premiere of the *Emperor* Concerto at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in 1811. Schneider was

an associate of Mendelssohn, who conducted performances of Symphony No 16 in A, a work that sits somewhere between Beethoven's Seventh and Mendelssohn's *Italian* – the former in particular inescapably brought to mind by the second-movement *Andante*. Two overtures, a *Tragic* and a *Gaudeamus igitur*, will evoke thoughts of another great 19th-century symphonist – but they date from 1818 and 1830, predating Brahms by half a century and more. Could he possibly have known them? Certain similarities are deliciously tantalising. They are all played with infectious enthusiasm by the Anhaltische Philharmonie of Dessau, the town to which Schneider moved from Leipzig and for which he wrote a further overture, which opens the disc.

Also reissued is a performance of Schneider's Symphony No 17 in C minor from Germany's oldest period orchestra, Cappella Coloniensis, under Sigiswald Kuijken. Once again, Beethoven's C minor mood is the governing spirit and the coupling is another C minor work, Mendelssohn's youthful First Symphony – almost approaching the fury with which it was recently attacked by the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra (Harmonia Mundi, 5/19) – along with the early D minor Violin Concerto with soloist Hiro Kurosaki. Through it all Schneider emerges as a product of his time but not without his own voice, however much he adopts the postures of his contemporaries. Well worth exploring. **G**

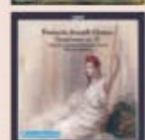
THE RECORDINGS



J Stamitz Symphonies, Op 3
Musica Viva Moscow CO / Rudin
Naxos **B** 8 573966



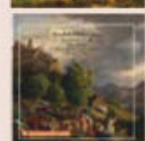
C Stamitz Clarinet Concertos Nos 3-5
Meyer; Kurpfälzisches CO / Schlaefli
CPO **F** CPO555 053-2



Gossec Symphonies, Op 4 **Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss** / Gaudenz
CPO **F** CPO555 263-2



JJ Rösler Symphony, Piano Concerto
Orch Eisenberg / Jiří Sycha
Koramant **F** KR11003



Schneider Symphony No 16, etc
Anhaltische Philh Dessau / Frank
CPO **F** CPO555 180-2



Schneider Symphony No 17, etc
Cappella Coloniensis / Kuijken
CPO **M** **B** CPO999 932-2

things around to become a joyful G major controlled dash coloured by minor keys only briefly – over which the soloist's lines enable Noally to show his capacity for lyricism across bubbling strings and virtuoso passagework, and the musicians of Les Accents an equal opportunity to show the polished silkiness and tight ensemble-playing with which they deliver their own bouncing rhythmic energy. Try from 1'42" in the finale to hear what I mean from all parties. The stately, pining slow movement is equally effective.

Les Accents' sound also works beautifully for Telemann's Concerto for violin and traverso in E minor, attractively softening the corners of a work that can sometimes end up sounding rather too angular; the first *Adagio*'s lyrical interplay between Noally and flautist Jean Bregnac is especially lovely, as is the one between them and the ensemble's soft background pizzicato. In short, there's lots to enjoy here.

Charlotte Gardner

'Verbier Festival'



'The 25th Anniversary Concert'

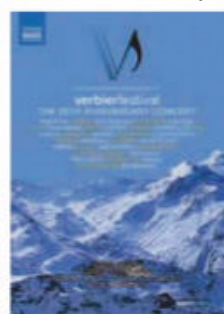
JS Bach Brandenburg Concerto No 3, BWV1048.
Jesus bleibet meine Freude, BWV147 **Brahms**
Souvenir de la Russie – excs **Dvořák** Slavonic
Dances – Op 46 No 5; Op 72 No 2 **Handel**
Messiah, HWV56 – Hallelujah **Heidrich** Happy
Birthday Variations **Lutosławski** Variations on
a Theme by Paganini **Mozart** Ave verum corpus,
K618 **Rachmaninov** Two Pieces for Piano,
Six Hands. Polka italienne. Suite No 1, Op 5 –
Barcarolle **Rossini** Guillaume Tell – Overture
Sarasate Navarra Fantasy (arr Sitkovetsky)
Smetana Sonata for Two Pianos, Eight Hands
J Strauss II Éljen a Magyar, Op 332.

Die Fledermaus – Champagne Medley
(arr Koncz); Overture

Various soloists; RIAS Chamber Choir; Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra / **Valery Gergiev, Gábor Takács-Nagy**

Naxos **F** **DVD** 2 110636; **F** **Blu-ray Disc** NBD0098V
(132' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live at the Salle des Combins, Verbier, Switzerland, July 25, 2018



The home viewer of this *Rheingold*-length gala enjoys certain advantages over the blinged-up patrons who packed the plastic hothouse of Verbier's lean-to concert hall on a sweltering evening last July. Comfort, for one. Choice would be another. Once really was enough for 10 minutes of Happy

Birthday mocked up à la *manière de* Brahms, Haydn, tango and the rest. A glutinous *Ave verum* and well-upholstered 'Hallelujah' chorus, accompanied by an organist who appears to have forgotten his suit, need not detain you long, however ageless and spirited the direction of Gábor Takács-Nagy.

All the same, a Third *Brandenburg Concerto* led off by a first-violin line of Zukerman, Vengerov, Repin and Kavakos can be guaranteed a certain level of inbuilt class. The vibe of collegial showing-off carries a bespoke arrangement of Sarasate's *Navarra* for 13 violins over the line, even if, as with voices, six virtuosos do not make for happy unisons. The challenge with such gala evenings is that everyone has to be given something to do. This birthday orchestra of soloists returns at the end to fill out the back desks of the festival's regular chamber orchestra for a *Fledermaus* Overture in circumstances that bring out the best in its conductor, Valery Gergiev.

The gala's hour-long central piano section also features distinguished music-making on the fly. Daniil Trifonov does his best to follow Mikhail Pletnev slowing to half speed for the chorale tune in his duet arrangement of Bach's *Jesu, joy of man's desiring*. Yuja Wang and Denis Kozhukhin nearly come off the rails in the *Paganini* Variations of Lutosławski, though they bring down the house in the process.

Among the most touching moments of the event is a six-hands Romance by Rachmaninov (whose opening became famous when the composer reused it in the slow movement of the Second Piano Concerto), in which Kissin and Trifonov are joined on the lowest part by the composer Rodion Shchedrin, now 85 but still possessed of a luminous touch and apparently effortless legato. Another elder statesman of the piano runs him close: Richard Goode, teaching Seong-Jin Cho a thing or two about playing Brahms in three *Souvenirs de la Russie*. They're all upstaged, however, by Thomas Quasthoff's uncredited insert to a *Fledermaus* medley, taking Cole Porter on a winter journey. For once, you didn't have to be there. It's just as good at home. **Peter Quantrill**

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Brahms's Violin Sonata No 1 in G

Charlotte Gardner talks to **Alina Ibragimova** about her 'just let it happen' approach to Brahms

Given that Brahms wrote his First Violin Sonata on an impromptu May holiday in Pörtschach, it's appropriate that when Alina Ibragimova and I sit down together with the score, it is outside in the sunshine, at the urban beach area of a café, complete with paddling pool. It's a fun, light-hearted meeting place, even if the actual sonata is less so.

Recorded in Henry Wood Hall, with Ibragimova playing on an Anselmo Bellosio violin (c1775) with covered gut strings, and Cédric Tiberghien on a modern grand, their new Hyperion album presents all three of Brahms's violin sonatas. Complete cycles are the pair's preferred way of recording, for the total immersion in a composer's language it offers; and indeed that total immersion has been especially useful with Brahms.

'I find Brahms such a particular language,' explains Ibragimova. 'Everything happens more slowly. You have to approach it trusting that it actually does everything itself, if you just let it happen, but it takes time to let go of the desire to make things happen quickly, and to feel like you have to *do* something with a phrase. So it took me a while to dare to do this recording.'

We look at the first page of the First Sonata. 'The time signature is 6/4 which is very unusual for an opening movement,' she begins. 'Then there's the question of tempo: what exactly does he mean with this *vivace*, and then why *ma non troppo*? Is it supposed to feel fast, is it supposed to feel calm? In the opening chords there *is* a sense of calm but also of slight anxiety, so there are little balances we have to find.'

Turning our attentions to the actual writing, we fix on the important dotted idea heard in the violin's first two notes. 'It appears over and over again throughout the piece,' she points out. 'Also, everywhere are these little hairpin crescendos, and again it's a question of, what do they mean? And in fact, they all mean different things. For instance, if you compare the hairpin straddling bars 11 and 12 with the one in bar 15, for me bars 11 to 12 have a real generosity – a sense of



Alina Ibragimova and Cédric Tiberghien at the sessions for the complete Brahms violin sonatas at Henry Wood Hall in May 2018

forgiveness, if you like – whereas at bar 15 it's just a passing lilt or little push.' I ask what 'generosity' means for the sound. 'Whatever you choose it to mean!' she says, laughing. 'It's a feeling, you know?'

We move to discussing the very Brahmsian metre. 'I love this in Brahms,' she says, singing one of the dotted rhythms in bar 73. 'These things sort of float – it's as though there's no ground.' I ask how she deals with this metrical 'limbo land', and she replies matter-of-factly: 'You find weightlessness, which we found difficult in the beginning. It's the same issue with Beethoven's Sonata No 10 in G major – how you capture this lightness with beats, bow changes and whatever else – and really it goes back to what I said earlier about Brahms's language, because it came to us with trust and experience.'

We admire the transition at bar 79, which at 82 then lands us back at the theme. 'Again, it's similar writing to Beethoven's Tenth Sonata – these little interweaving quaver figures between violin and piano from bar 91 where you're sort of going alongside each other while not quite knowing where the first beat is,' she says. 'It becomes this cloudy thing. Then there's this beautiful little progression going into amazing places harmonically before finally ending up in bar 99 in A flat major – as you do in a G major piece!'

She chuckles. 'Then finally he kind of lets go around bar 107, but at the same time it's marked *sostenuto* so you can't ever let rip entirely. I think Brahms is much more fragile than people give him credit for, a lot of the time. There's a lot of vulnerability in there.' But it's triumphant at the end, I suggest. 'Yes. I use the word "generous" a lot, but it really is – the way it blossoms out when finally we're back in G major.'

Turning to the E flat major second-movement *Adagio*, I ask what she and Tiberghien are trying to create here, off the back of that joyful first movement conclusion. 'See all these little entries I have with their hairpins?' she says, flicking through the pages. 'This time the hairpins represent real pain. Sobbing, even.'

Looking at them, I'm reminded of how I myself struggled as a student violinist with the fragmented, sighing phrases of the A major Second Sonata – with how to get the weight right, and also with how to give the impression of an unbroken line of thought. 'It is difficult, yes,' Ibragimova agrees. 'You're still part of very long phrases. And short-short-long rhythms. There are so many things to think about. There's also the question of tempo again, because it's so slow and yet it can't sound slow. I never envy the pianist at the start of this movement, being the one who has to find the right tempo straight away.'


'There's a purposelessness in the last movement, a sort of pain that isn't sharp but is a constant gnawing heaviness'

We look at the second page of the *Adagio* second movement, where at bar 24 the tonality moves to E flat minor. 'It's incredibly dark,' she says. 'For me there is a lot of Clara Schumann in this piece. She had a hard life, and I think Brahms was very compassionate about that.'

At bar 67 the violin reprises the piano's opening theme. 'The double stops are on the violin's bottom two strings, making a very warm sound, and then disappears into nothing,' she explains. 'It requires a whole world of sounds.'

The transition into the final recapitulation draws appreciative comments from Ibragimova. 'The harmonies are so beautiful from around bar 97,' she enthuses. 'This A natural that suddenly comes at bar 100; the chromaticism, and then this *dolce* marking at bar 105 – and for me *dolce* in Brahms is always really singing and beautiful; I don't think it's a disappearing thing – it's almost *espressivo*. And then the movement finishes peacefully back in E flat major.'

Another emotional shift occurs in the final movement, for which Brahms borrowed from two tellingly titled earlier songs of his, 'Nachklang' ('Reminiscence') and 'Regenlied' ('Rain Song'). 'It's grey and unclear – there's a feeling of purposelessness, a sort of pain that isn't sharp but is instead a constant gnawing heaviness. And again this is writing where you have to just let that happen and not phrase too much. It almost has to be boring.'

What about the *espressivo dolce* marking at bar 53, I ask? Does this have to sound different? 'You implement little changes of colour,' she says carefully, 'but the rain and greyness always stays the same. But then at the end we have G major, which I think signifies an acceptance. Something lighter than forgiveness: an inner peace.' 

► To read Gramophone's review of Ibragimova's Brahms sonatas, turn to page 57



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Charlotte Gardner immerses herself in Vivaldi string concertos:

'L'Archicembalo are big on their bass; for some that's great fun, but others might prefer a bit less welly' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**



Pwyll ap Siôn on Miloš's ambitious new album 'The Sound of Silence':

'Miloš has been on a mission in recent years to bring seemingly incompatible sides of the guitar's character closer together' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**

Bartók • Veress

Bartók Piano Quintet, Sz23^a **Veress** String Trio^b

^aBarnabás Kelemen, Vilde Frang *vns* ^aKatalin

Kokas, ^bLawrence Power *vas* Nicolas Altstaedt *vc*

^bAlexander Lonquich *pf*

Alpha © ALPHA458 (62' • DDD)



If you pan back to 1954 in search of the year's finest music, Vaughan

Williams's Tuba Concerto and Lutosławski's Concerto for Orchestra are among the best-known highlights. But what about Sándor Veress's only String Trio? It flirts with atonality much as Alban Berg did, except that, whereas Berg echoed Mahlerian expressionism, with Veress experimentation encircles Hungarian folk music. Even the Trio's slow-fast binary form recalls the rhapsodies of Liszt and Bartók, though music near the start of the second section recalls the firefly Scherzo from Prokofiev's Third Symphony (here Frang and her colleagues really do play up the resemblance – whether consciously or not I couldn't tell you).

The level of invention is startling throughout, with the players being instructed to rap on the bodies of the instruments with their knuckles. The principal rhythmic 'riff' appears in various guises, bowed, plucked and drummed. But what's most amazing is the work's high level of concentration: although a mere 20 minutes in length, by the time you're through with it you feel as if you've experienced an entire Mahler symphony. So much is said, so many varied sounds shared between three. The only work I can think of that has a similar effect is by Veress's principal creative guide, Bartók, his Third Quartet. I'd say with some degree of confidence that this Trio approaches that same level of attainment, vying with Schoenberg's Trio in its profound effect, while Vilde Frang, Lawrence Power and Nicolas Altstaedt

grant it a superb performance, the best I've yet heard in fact.

Memorable rival recordings include members of the Merel Quartet (Cybèle Records), which, though well played, isn't on quite on the same level, while Ensemble Equilibres (Hungaroton) underline the work's Bartókian roots. Neither threatens the supremacy of Frang et al, though it's useful to know that both are programmed in the context of other chamber works by Veress.

Bartók's Piano Quintet, a product of 1903 and an altogether more modest affair, summons Brahms and Strauss as obvious influences. The composer was in his early twenties when he wrote the work but a couple of decades later, when he performed it as part of a programme including more characteristic pieces, Bartók was incensed by audience members who rated the Quintet highest of all. He even hurled the score to the ground in disgust and was thought to have destroyed it, though fortunately for us the Quintet, an enjoyable piece by any standards, survived his anger. At times the brooding *Adagio* suggests Bluebeard's shadow before giving way to the temperamental finale, which accelerates gypsy-style (the principal theme harbours a sure reference to Brahms's *Zigeunerlieder*), and surveying numerous expressive techniques and tempo changes, including a trim fughetta. Barnabás Kelemen and friends keep the camp fires alight with playing that is both intense and dynamic, whereas the slower music has a dreamily rhapsodising quality about it.

Runners-up on CD include Jenő Jandó with the Kodály Quartet (Naxos, 10/95), a good performance though nowhere near as vivid or fiery as the performance under review. Nor does Hungaroton's worthy recording with Csilla Szabó and the Tatrai Quartet prove a formidable contender. So I think it fair to say that Kelemen, Frang, Katalin Kokas, Altstaedt and Alexander Lonquich sell this lovable product of youthful creative excess more securely than any of their predecessors on disc, certainly any that I have encountered. But what

makes this CD unmissable is the Veress Trio, a masterpiece and a performance to match. I've already pencilled it in as a potential contender for next year's *Gramophone* Awards. The annotation is excellent, including a fine essay on the Trio by Sándor's son Claudio, also a composer.

Rob Cowan

Brahms • Pesson • Sciarrino

'Quasi morendo'

Brahms Clarinet Quintet, Op 115^a **Pesson**

Nebenstück^a **Sciarrino** Let Me Die Before I Wake

Reto Bieri *cl* **Meta4**

ECM New Series © 481 8082 (58' • DDD)



In this typically provocative compilation, ECM producer Manfred

Eicher doesn't simply present a sequence of three separate, well-contrasted compositions: rather, by minimising the separation between them, he devises a new, continuous composition that has quite different qualities from the three components considered separately. As a consequence, Brahms's role is not so much that of 'the ghost of music past', a strange remnant framed by the living essence of contemporary, modernist identities. While Brahms's message is that of timeless tonal truth, as alive today as it was on its creation in 1891, the two living composers come across as seeking something positively negative: for Salvatore Sciarrino, a title borrowed from a book defending euthanasia fits a music of haunting evanescence, struggling for breath as it achieves a precariously refined eloquence, while for Gérard Pesson, in a piece he defines as a 'filtrage' of Brahms's early Ballade, Op 10 No 4, the march-like features of the original are transformed into the kind of bleak but hypnotic meditation through which much new music communicates its principled unease with present-day cultural conventions.



Violinist Vilde Frang, cellist Nicolas Altstaedt and pianist Alexander Lonquich are among an outstanding line-up in Bartók's Piano Quintet

The quirky simplicity of Sciarrino's vocabulary, far from upbeat minimalist exuberance, serves an elegy dispersed between low and very high sounds, occasionally disrupted with aggressive interjections that are inevitably short-lived; a haunting vision superbly conveyed in Reto Bieri's uncannily controlled playing. After Sciarrino, the Brahms Quintet (in a very close-focus acoustic) seems almost oppressively fervent and refined, until the insistently melancholic tone it shares with all the music on the disc asserts its own distinctive presence, evolving into a battle with a spirit of rhapsodic defiance that motivates the starkness of the quintet's final B minor cadence. That starkness then resonates through the fractured lyricism of Pesson's *Nebenstück*, an ironic title probably best translated as 'piece about nearness', though in truth the distance from its Brahmsian source, and the subsequent, poignant disintegration of its identity, is what this powerful, inventively textured music best conveys. **Arnold Whittall**

Brahms • C Schumann

Brahms Three Violin Sonatas

C Schumann Romance, Op 22 No 1

Alina Ibragimova *vn* **Cédric Tiberghien** *pf*
Hyperion © CDA68200 (71' • DDD)



Alina Ibragimova's quiet playing is perhaps the most arresting feature of these performances, especially as she and Cédric Tiberghien are extremely attentive to the preponderance of *piano* and *pianissimo* markings in all three of Brahms's violin sonatas. Listen to the lyrical centre of Op 78's finale, say, where the music shifts from rain-soaked G minor to radiant E flat major. On first hearing I was disappointed that Ibragimova holds back even when the melody suddenly takes wing (first at 4'06" and then, again, an octave higher); later, with the score in front of me, seeing that in fact the entire thematic section is marked *piano*, her apparent reticence made sense.

There are more than a few places, however, where the violinist responds to Brahms's expressive indications a little too coolly for my liking. Her tone is more chaste than sweet in the opening phrases of Op 100's *Andante tranquillo*, for instance, despite the *dolce* directive; for contrast, try Tetzlaff, who plays it with

profound tenderness (Ondine, 9/16). Ibragimova and Tiberghien's hurried tempo doesn't help matters, either. And while both musicians are generally scrupulous when it comes to dynamics, other crucial markings are overlooked. Where, for example, are the violin's hairpin *crescendo-diminuendos* in the primary theme of Op 108's *Allegro*? Tetzlaff, for one, makes dizzying drama from this key detail.

Still, there are marvellous moments and entire movements that make this beautifully recorded disc worth hearing. The finale of Op 100 conveys both warmth and wonder through subtle colouring, supple phrasing and a streamlined narrative trajectory; and the delicacy of Op 108's third movement is ravishing, thanks in large part to Tiberghien's feather-light touch. Indeed, the pianist's playing is captivating throughout, his *pianissimos* just as breathtaking as his partner's. Their choice of encore, a Romance by Clara Schumann rather than the usual Scherzo from the *FAE* Sonata, is most welcome, and they find rich emotional ambiguities in the music's melodic and harmonic intricacies.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Brahms • Bruch • Schubert

Brahms Trio, Op 40 **Bruch** Eight Pieces, Op 83
Schubert Notturmo, D897

Natalia Lomeiko *vn* **Yuri Zhislin** *va* **Ivan Martin** *pf*
Orchid © ORC100098 (76' • DDD)

Brahms

Clarinet Trio, Op 114^a.

Two Clarinet Sonatas, Op 120^b

Joseph Shiner *cl*

^a**Yoanna Prodanova** *vc* **Somi Kim** *pf*

Orchid © ORC100099 (65' • DDD)



The canon is dead, we're told. And yet week in, week out, they keep coming: new recordings of supposed warhorses by superb young musicians from around the world, all still apparently driven – in a world of limitless musical possibilities – by a heartfelt desire to engage with what all these dead white European males have to say. Perhaps Orchid Classics didn't get the memo. Anyway, here in short order come two recitals of often-recorded classics, each bringing something fresh to the table. Indeed, the first of the pair goes to the extent of recording alternate versions of the original works, so strongly are these artists drawn to this music.

That's the disc by Natalia Lomeiko, Yuri Zhislin and Ivan Martin. I'm not entirely convinced that Brahms's Horn Trio gains much by being played on a viola (Brahms's own dismissal of the modern valve horn as a 'brass viola' suggests that he wasn't either), and in the first and third movements, in particular, you really need that sense of human breath, with its organic fade and dying fall. The same might be said of Bruch's infinitely more lightweight Eight Pieces for clarinet, viola and piano, particularly in the 'Romanian' fifth piece, where Bruch leans so heavily on folk colour.

Yet there's no disputing the sincerity of these readings or the fact that they give us something new: the steady, quiet deliberation with which they set about each work, the air of reticent melancholy that hangs over the Brahms and the aura of free-floating enchantment in Schubert's *Notturmo*. Lomeiko's mild violin tone makes an attractive blend for Zhislin's throaty viola; the balance is natural and intimate, and Martin's pianism adds some lovely, unaffected touches of fantasy: harp colours in the Schubert and the jangle of a cimbalom in the Bruch.

The other disc, by contrast, is wholly 'legitimate': Brahms's Clarinet Trio is paired with both of his late Clarinet Sonatas. And while the overall mood here, too, is reflective, there's no shortage of drama, either. Clarinetist Joseph Shiner and pianist Somi Kim swing from stormy grandiloquence to twilight poetry in the outer movements of the F minor Sonata, before Shiner's mellow, broad clarinet sound and Kim's limpid piano-playing open out into the rolling vistas and whispered confidences of the E flat Second Sonata. If I've any reservation here it's that Yoanna Prodanova's sweet but lean cello timbre tends to vanish into the general tumult at the Trio's craggier peaks. But these are attractive, musicianly performances; indeed, either of these discs would reward your time and care.

Richard Bratby

Chausson • Ravel

Chausson Piano Trio, Op 3 **Ravel** Piano Trio

Vienna Piano Trio

Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG942 2130-6
(59' • DDD/DSD)



The Vienna Piano Trio already have a live recording of Ravel's masterpiece in their portfolio (also for MDG, from 2011). But their latest venture adds finesse, maturity and lucidity, as well as warmer recording, to an already finely honed interpretation. There is a great sense of architecture within each movement, without detriment to the all-important mercurial atmosphere. This is particularly the case for the third-movement Passacaille, where they sustain a long line, helped by a more flowing tempo than, say, the scarcely less fine Beaux Arts. The latter offer more of a contemplation, compared to the Vienna Trio's persistent walk against wind and snowstorm.

The same kind of flow, supporting passionate outbursts, gives the first movement a more natural dancelike lilt, where the Beaux Arts allow a little more breathing space within each phrase for the magic of the harmony to be fully absorbed. Even better at conveying the movement's shimmering fluidity are the Capuçons and Braley, though some may find them at times excessively enthusiastic. In the *assez vif* 'Pantoum' second movement, preferences might easily go another way, since there is a greater responsiveness and edginess in both the Beaux Arts and, in

particular, the Capuçon/Braley accounts, while the Vienna Trio instead allow each player to enunciate the theme clearly before handing it over to the next. All in all, honours even.

With its dense textures and heightened drama, Chausson's Franck-inspired Trio makes a great pairing. There are some breathtakingly lyrical moments in the violin and cello here, and the rich piano figuration never feels laboured. Again, there is a more unified approach to each movement compared to the Beaux Arts with their coaxing rubatos. The Vienna Trio's forward drive is particularly welcome in the slow movement, where a more static approach to the elaborate thematic developments can easily bring the music to a virtual standstill, as is the danger with the Wanderer Trio, who clock in a whole minute slower. The stormy finale avoids slipping into a frenetic whirlpool and the return of the opening material is cherished with a noble sense of resignation that makes for a moving conclusion to a finely played and recorded disc. **Michelle Assay**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Beaux Arts Trio (4/85) (PHIL) ➔ 411 141-2PH

Trio Wanderer (HARM) HMA195 1967

Ravel – selected comparisons:

R & G Capuçon, Braley (6/10) (VIRG/ERAT) 545492-2

Vienna Pf Trio (MDG) MDG342 1685-2

Dandrieu • Corelli

Corelli Sonatas: Op 2 - No 8; No 12; Op 4 No 1

Dandrieu Six Sonatas, Op 1. La Corelli
(transr Taylor)

Le Consort

Alpha © ALPHA542 (62' • DDD)



Le Consort's decision to record these six sonatas by Jean-François

Dandrieu, an obscure 18th-century French composer best known for his treatise on basso continuo-playing, speaks of a wisdom and humility beyond their years. In their booklet notes, Le Consort remind us that Dandrieu was only 23 years old when he published his Op 1 and that, by 'happy coincidence', this was also the age when they first met – indeed, these were the very sonatas that they played at their first rehearsal. Again, let age not fool you: this group of twenty-somethings make a sound that is rich in refinement and intelligence.

The music itself is unlikely to take the Baroque world by storm. There are, however, a scattering of spectacular

moments. The cello-playing of Hanna Salzenstein is sumptuous and sprightly in equal measure, propelling the group forwards in exhilarating motion and bountiful resonance in the *Allegro* of No 1. Not to be outdone, the violinists give as good as they get in the *Vivace* from No 5. Corelli's influence on Dandrieu is most obvious in the following *Adagio*. Le Consort could do more to bring out the squeeze of dissonance, to test the limits of intensity possible on the recorded medium. Elsewhere they demonstrate a clever ear and willingness to experiment with textures. The Giga from No 1, though not at all gigue-like in tempo or affect, is luxurious in figuration. And though some might find the pizzicato *Vivace* movements from Sonata No 4 a tad kitsch, a little kitsch never hurt anyone. Justin Taylor, as expected, provides continuo realisations that are generous and joyful. His unobtrusive brilliance comes to the fore in the *Ciaccona* from Corelli's Sonata Op 2 No 12 that closes the disc. **Mark Seow**

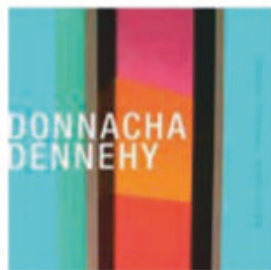
Dennehy

Disposable Dissonance^a. Surface Tension^b

^aCrash Ensemble / Ryan McAdams;

^bThird Coast Percussion

New Amsterdam Ⓢ NWAM118 (41' • DDD)



Donnacha Dennehy's arrival as a composer in the late 1990s

heralded what was dubbed the new Irish classical. Often performed by the amplified Crash Ensemble (which he co-founded), Dennehy's music injected welcome verve, grit and streetwiseness into the Irish classical scene. As a teacher at Trinity College Dublin, Dennehy had a lasting influence in the early years of the new millennium on the youngest generation of Irish composers. Now based in the US, Dennehy in some of his recent music has shifted more towards the centre ground, but these two works hearken back more to that early edginess.

In *Surface Tension* (2015), inspired by the Irish bodhrán drum, Dennehy explores glissandos on the drumskin's surface. A pulsating texture of continuous semiquavers on tom-tom gradually rises and falls in pitch, with strikes on other drums cutting through the texture. After a while, a marimba joins in; later, a bowed vibraphone carves out a shimmering tonal centre.

Dennehy's characteristic mélange of post-minimalist rhythm with light spectralist harmony evokes a 'journey' experience. Works for percussion can sometimes suffer on disc, the music's dramatic charge when witnessed live being hard to replicate on a recording. Here, though, Third Coast Percussion produce a winning display full of dynamism and sensitivity.

The three sections of *Disposable Dissonance* (2012), linked in a continuous texture, explore different types of dissonance. The opening section is a waterfall of polyphony cascading around a minor-key centre. Its harmonic character reminds me of Philip Glass, albeit with individual melodic lines subsumed within the overall ensemble polyphony. Accordion and glockenspiel occasionally come through with splashes of colour. The second and third sections are more interesting. Polyrhythms, stratifications and syncopations are employed alongside harmonic dissonance and modulation to create ambiguity and tension; electric guitar and clarinet have brief moments in the spotlight; before eventually we end back in the relative stability of the opening material. As always, the Crash Ensemble shine in this material. **Liam Cagney**

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Dynamism and sensitivity: Third Coast Percussion play Donnacha Dennehy's *Surface Tension* – see review on page 59

Nørgård

Babette's Feast – Suite. *Spell*.

Trio breve. *Whirl's World*

Ensemble MidtVest

Dacapo © 8 226136 (59' • DDD)



It's a mistake to consider Per Nørgård a dogmatic composer and this release proves it in style, placing some of his strictest system-based musical structures alongside wide-eyed film music as if to prove that both are built of the same clarity, sincerity and *joie de vivre*.

Spell (1973) for clarinet, cello and piano followed Nørgård's Symphony No 2 and, like that piece, uses the Infinity Series (the composer's personal integer sequence) to set up a gorgeous self-perpetuating structure that is flicked like a spinning top on to its path for the composer to nudge now and then when he needs to. And this composer knows exactly when he needs to: the modulation at 8'26", the clarinet glissando that follows and the symmetrical wind-down that brings the music to its pleasingly shy ending.



There is symmetry, too, in *Whirl's World* (1970), a work related to Nørgård's seminal *Voyage into the Golden Screen* (1968), which advances certain foundations laid by the composer's Nordic forbears (Sibelius included) in establishing a tight pattern from which listeners can discern their own musical forms. It works because Nørgård gathers his material with a care and clarity, which itself sorts out momentum. The aforementioned symmetry helps; the piece is almost a clear palindrome. The mini geometric mosaics that form *Trio breve* (2012) feel like dispersed shrapnel from these bigger pieces.

In between, we hear the full breadth of the music Nørgård wrote for Gabriel Axel's 1987 film realisation of Karen Blixen's short story *Babette's Feast* (only a tenth of it made it into the picture, which won Denmark its first Academy Award). Still Nørgård winds his structures tightly, which sets up the claustrophobia of the village setting nicely in 'Babette by Herself' and gets right to the heart of the volume title, *Anecdotes of Destiny*, in the vibrato-less ditties of 'Pastoral' and 'Homecoming' (the whole book is really about retaining worldliness and humility in the presence of grandeur and greatness).

Those two, in particular, are gorgeously played, with a lightness of bow contact that stands in total contrast to the deep engagement we heard in the cello solo of *Spell*, to cite just one instance of stylistic flexibility in performances that are sublime and knowing. I can think of few composers of the last half a century whose music is so disciplined yet so heartfelt, so original yet so rooted. These are precious values and the unassuming, plain-speaking nature of the music here only proves it. **Andrew Mellor**

N Simpson

Remembered Music^a. Two String Quartets

^aCharlotte Trepess sop **Zelkova Quartet**

Stone Records © 5060192 780871 (52' • DDD • T)



Now in his early sixties, Nicholas Simpson studied composition during the 1980s with John Tavener at Trinity College, London. However, one is more likely to detect the influence of late 19th- and early 20th-century tonality on the two string quartets heard here. The disc's title, 'Remembered Music', is taken from a line

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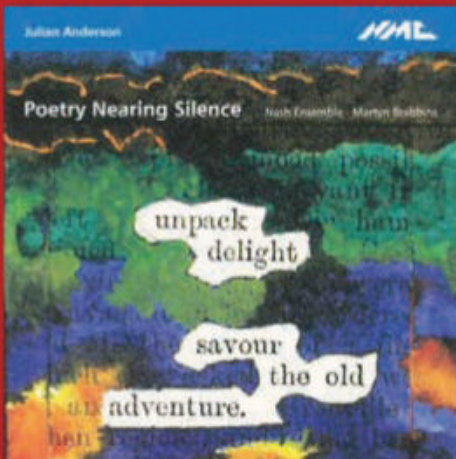


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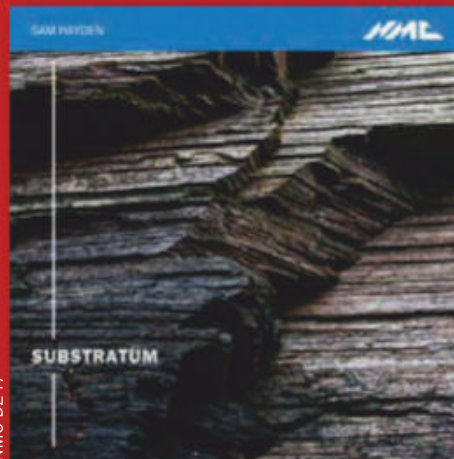


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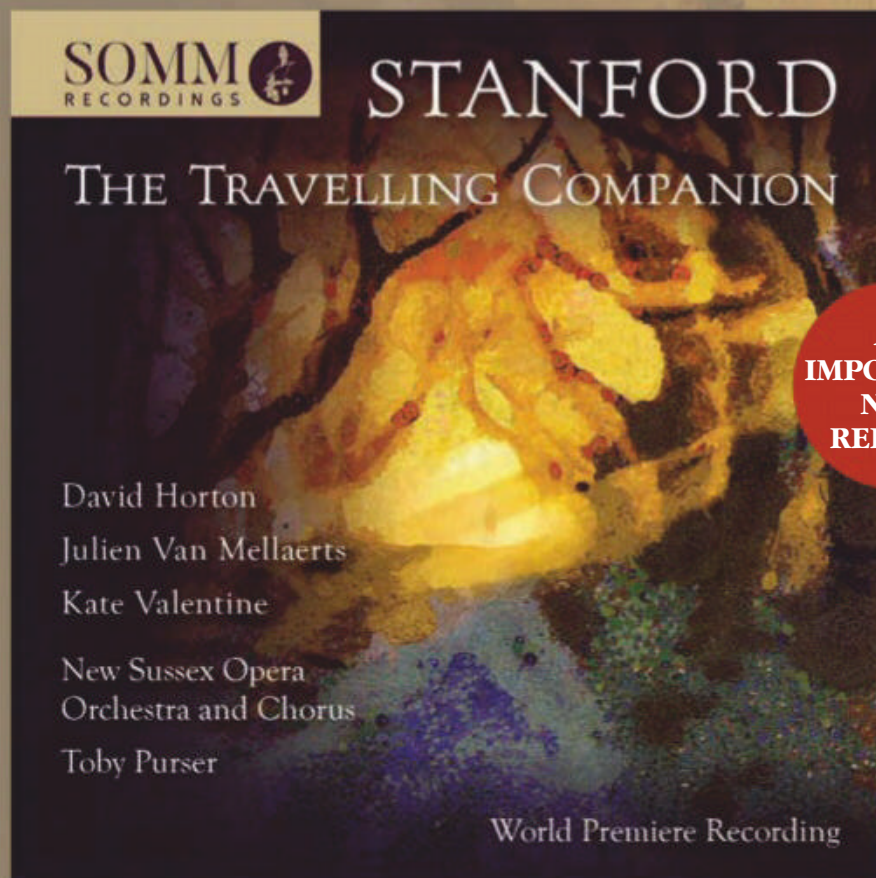
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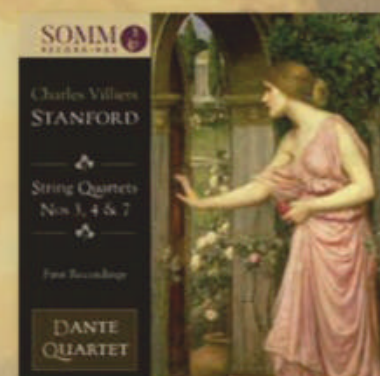
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by the poet Kathleen Raine, whose *On a Deserted Shore* forms the basis for the earliest featured work. Composed in 1988, *Remembered Music* for voice and quartet is an evocative setting that benefits from a thoughtful and sensitively shaped response to the text from soprano Charlotte Treppess.

Simpson's style has sometimes been compared with his older namesake, Robert, but his music bears as much the trace of Eastern European and Scandinavian influences. His predilection for developing ideas from small, germ-like motifs is evident in both quartets. Bartók's late Sixth Quartet is suggested in the String Quartet in G minor (2013), which opens hesitatingly with a rising and falling two-note figure. Passed around between the ensemble in a question-and-answer-type texture, this two-note idea takes on a more intensive character as the movement unfolds. A three-note pattern is heard at the beginning of a dynamic, dancelike second movement, which soon transforms itself into a syncopated folk-like tune. A slow third movement revisits the first's two-note idea against gradually rising, wedge-like harmonic shifts that call to mind the sound world of Einojuhani Rautavaara.

The first movement of Simpson's earlier String Quartet in C evinces a mosaic-like structure, while its Beethoven-inspired finale amply demonstrates the composer's solid contrapuntal technique. The Zelkova Quartet display impressive control and command over the material throughout. Simpson reveals in the booklet notes that he only truly re-embraced composition during the 1990s, when 'the great serialist terror was coming to an end'. Sympathetic listeners will no doubt identify with Simpson's unfussy tonal style; others more willing to embrace modernist ideals and the spirit of the avant-garde may well dwell ruefully on the rather perverse notion that, as a point of comparison, James Dillon's String Quartet No 2 was being written at almost exactly the same time as Simpson's String Quartet in C. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Vivaldi

Complete Concertos and Sinfonias
for Strings and Basso continuo

L'Archicembalo

Brilliant Classics © ④ 95835 (4h 23' • DDD)

Disc 4 from Tactus TC672259



In 1739 a Frenchman, Charles de Brosses, wrote from Venice: 'Here they have a form

of music that we know in France not at all, and I am convinced that it would be particularly well suited to the Bourbonne gardens. It consists of the grand Concerti in which there is no principal violin.'

These soloist-free *concerti ripieni* and *sinfonias* were clearly useful to Vivaldi, too, perhaps for those occasions when he didn't have a decent soloist to hand, meaning that 40 of them have come down to us in his handwritten scores, largely composed between 1720 and 1741, with a further 12 in a collection in Paris. Structurally, all share the solo concerto's three-movement fast-slow-fast structure, with the concertos' three being more evenly weighted than those of the *sinfonias*, which tend to have a longer first movement. The concertos' outer movements also tend to be more bristling with contrapuntal complexities than their *sinfonia* counterparts, which by contrast tend to have their first and second violins playing in unison. Still, the writing for those unison violins is virtuoso, and the textures full, in recognition of the opera symphony from which they are derived. In the context of this consistency, it's hard to know whether one should be impressed at this dishing-up of 40 concertos and 11 *sinfonias* in one serving or just a little frightened.

L'Archicembalo perform on historical instruments in a line-up of three violins, viola, cello, violone and harpsichord, and a broad description of their sound would be that it's as energetic, exuberant and rhythmic as you'd expect from Vivaldi performances, with a polish and attack that places it somewhere in the middle of the Vivaldi timbral punch-o-meter. They are also, as the presence of the violone perhaps hints, big on their bass; for some, such as myself, that's great fun – get a load of the bass rumble below the dancing final Minuet of RV136 in F, for instance, or the more subtle thunder underneath the swirling violins of the final *Allegro* of RV150 in G (although rather less subtle in the few flourishes they do get!) – but others might prefer a bit less welly down there. As for the tempos, think brisk but not breakneck.

Moving on to details, take the courtly delicacy of the *Andante* of the B flat major Concerto, RV163, where the bass steps well back in honour of the trebles, and harpsichordist Daniela Demicheli provides subtly shaped legato momentum underneath the violins' beautifully soft delivery of their lines' huge large leaps. Or, with the final *Allegro* of the A major, RV159, the mutual chamber understanding with which the solo duetting violins weave their triple-time dance around each other.

Listen, though, to what Andrew Parrott and the Taverner Players do with the G major Concerto, RV151 (EMI/Erato, 12/91), and the answer is something a little more fleet-footed and elegant, at least to my ears. Parrott and company then follow RV151 with the palette-cleansing textures of the Concerto for Multiple Instruments, RV577, whose recorders and oboes instantly refresh the ears; and ultimately I think this gets to the nub of the problem with this well-played, ambitious set: namely that it's hard to keep hooking the ear over this number of strings-only Vivaldi works. In fact, Adrian Chandler and La Serenissima's own rhythmically punchy reading of RV151 (Avie, 5/17) adds woodwind anyway, while with Pinnock there are oboes and a theorbo in the mix, to which no doubt Vivaldi himself wouldn't have been averse.

Perhaps this matters little in these days when playlisting is so much the norm. Only with Vivaldi in particular, with his relatively consistent language, I do think some more imaginative programming also needs to come in if a recording is genuinely to sing; and all the more so when it's this much of this particular repertoire.

Charlotte Gardner

'The Leipzig Circle, Vol 1'

Fanny Mendelssohn Piano Trio, Op 11 **Felix**

Mendelssohn Songs without Words, Op 109

C Schumann Three Romances, Op 22

R Schumann Piano Trio No 1, Op 63

London Bridge Trio

Somm Céleste © SOMMCD0199 (72' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Birmingham

Conservatoire, April 17 and December 18, 2018



It's an attractive idea: a programme of chamber music by four mutual friends,

Robert and Clara Schumann and Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn. Two D minor piano trios anchor the programme – by Fanny and Robert – while salon pieces by Felix and Clara fill out the running time very appealingly, as well as providing brief solo showcases for the London Bridge Trio's violinist David Adams and cellist Kate Gould.

Everything here is played with sensitivity and conviction. The three players summon up the whirlwind that opens Fanny's Trio in fine style, and the energy never flags, with a lilting, lifting rhythmic alertness in the two inner movements and a real sense of the

mood-shifting *Sturm und Drang* that drives Robert's Trio. The gradual withdrawal from nervy melancholy to deep inwardness in Robert's slow movement is impressively managed – *inniger Empfindung* indeed. And there's an unforced naturalness – a lack of affectation – about these readings that many will enjoy: a tonal and expressive sweetness without getting sticky that feels just right in Clara's Romances and Felix's lollipop of an Op 109.

Sadly, the recorded sound does not flatter these performances. Piano trios are never easy to balance, especially not in a live performance (applause is audible after the two trios but not, oddly, the other works). The acoustic of the new concert hall at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire hasn't sounded this muddy when I've attended in person; more problematically, the piano is simultaneously recessed and over-resonant, giving it a tinny edge and making the strings sound as if they're having to struggle – even, at times, in the two solo works. A real pity, because there's a lot here to enjoy.

Richard Bratby

'Silk Baroque'

JS Bach Solo Violin Sonata No2, BWV1003 – Andante sostenuto **Leclair** Gavotte **Rameau** Castor et Pollux – Tristes apprêts **Steenbrink** Abendmusik. Chaos for Wu Wei (after Rebel). Dancing Song of the Yao Tribe. Harlequinade (after Telemann). Polonois chinois (after Melante). Pferderennen. Prelude for Prelude (after Rameau). Silk Rondeau (for Maite). What about some bells (after Telemann) **Telemann** Sey Tausenmahl Willkommen **Vivaldi** Trio Sonata, 'La follia', Op 1 No 12 RV63 **Wu Wei** Improvisation (for my father)

Wu Wei *sheng* **Holland Baroque**

Pentatone (P) PTC5186 800 (68' • DDD/DSD)



To borrow from the psychologist James J Gibson, our eyes are on 'the head on the shoulders of a body that gets about'. The same goes for our ears. In other words, when listening to a recording we don't just use our ears, but bring to it our entire selves – our walking, eating, breathing skin-covered selves. Before I describe the wonderful feast of sonic fusion that is this release from Holland Baroque and Wu Wei, then, I'll lay my cards on the table. So rarely do I come across a recording that seems to speak directly to me, to my identity. As a performer and

musicologist, I am immersed in music of the high Baroque. And often in my 'day job', I wonder how my Chinese ethnicity emerges. The answer is rarely: the musical language of 18th-century German men – Handel, Bach, Telemann – has become my mother tongue. This musical encounter between Holland Baroque and sheng virtuoso Wu Wei, in many ways, produces sounds I have been searching for my entire professional life.

The album is made up of extremely clever arrangements by Judith and Tineke Steenbrink, the masterminds behind Holland Baroque, in which works of the Baroque are fused with the sound world of ancient China. The sounds that Wei conjures on his sheng, a Chinese mouth organ, are tough to describe. Sometimes they are ethereal, a prophecy spun on the air. They can also be entirely present: a carnival on your doorstep, rowdy, drunken and wild. And Wei can also make his sheng scream in poignant pain. At the heart of the album is a solo improvisation dedicated to his father that intensely unfolds into Telemann's *Harlequinade* in which Holland Baroque, fleet of foot, whirl in a hallucinogenic madness. There are also traditional Chinese songs, such as the *Abendmusik* that evaporates into the night. A sense of the improvisatory pervades the album, even the arrangement of Bach's Andante from BWV1003; this is music made brand new. And in 'Tristes apprêts' from *Castor et Pollux*, Wei slides between notes of Rameau's melody as if he is conjuring it there and then. The geographical meandering and sense of exploration are particularly successful given the length of the tracks. The listener is given time and space to settle into far-reaching sound worlds that sometimes have unexpected destinations. In *What about some bells*, the opening track, Judith Steenbrink's arrangement of Telemann takes us from China through folk-like reels to the land of cowboys and bluegrass.

The cultural reciprocity of the disc is astounding – the listener begins to hear the Baroque in Wei's Chinese performing traditions, as well as to find elements of the Chinese aesthetic in the historically informed playing of Europe. There is an overwhelming – and emotional – sense of a land being shared, of common ground being marked out and danced upon. While I agree with the Steenbrinks that 'the Baroque can be found in many places', here, in this wonderful meeting of cultures, the Chinese can too.

Mark Seow

'The Sound of Silence'

Arlen Over the Rainbow **D & R Armstrong** Life for Rent **Barrow/Gibbons/Utley** Sour Times **Brouwer** Canción de cuna (Berceuse) **Calandrelli** Solitude^a **Cohen** Famous Blue Raincoat **Falla** Siete Canciones populares españolas – Nana^a **Hafermann/Batson/Elizondo** Moving Mountains **Hayward** Nights in White Satin^b **Legrand** What are you doing the rest of your life? **Merlin** Evocación **Merritt** The Book of Love **Pujol** Suite del Plata No 1 – Milonga **Radiohead** Street Spirit (Fade Out) **P Simon** The Sound of Silence **Tárrega** Preludios – Endecha y Oremus

Miloš Karadaglić *gtr* with **12 ensemble**;

^aJess Gillam *sax* ^bManu Delago *perc*

Decca (P) 777 9637; (P) (P) 777 9638 (44' • DDD)



The guitar is a two-headed beast. In its civilised, classical form it is the

instrument of the concert hall. Yet there's also its wild, electric cousin. Plugged into a wall of amplifiers and cranked up to the max, the guitar is capable of unleashing ear-splitting cacophony. Never the twain shall meet? Well, Sean Shibe has already given us his imaginatively programmed 'softLOUD' (Delphian, A/18), and now Miloš Karadaglić offers something quite different. Miloš has been on something of a mission in recent years to bring these seemingly incompatible sides of the guitar's character closer together, and while this doesn't necessarily mean forming a rock band or playing Jimi Hendrix, it has involved a process whereby he has sought to appropriate repertoire that has remained largely the preserve of the electric guitar.

'Blackbird' (Mercury, 3/16), contained some beautiful renditions by Miloš of songs by The Beatles. However, almost every moment demonstrated that the transition from pop to classical on that album was a relatively straightforward one. 'The Sound of Silence' is more ambitious in that it casts its net much wider, drawing on rock repertoire that is distinctly less classical-sounding. It's a recipe that works well at times. Miloš faithfully renders the vocal line from Portishead's 'Sour Times' to gently pulsing string pizzicatos and floating piano figurations. Plangent thirds add colour to a similarly atmospheric version of 'The Magnetic Fields' 'The Book of Love', while hemiola-like patterns add character to Skylar Grey's folksy 'Moving Mountains' and Dido's 'Life for Rent'. The chamber-style setting also serves to foreground the simplicity of these arrangements. In



Baroque music fused with the sound world of ancient China: sheng virtuoso Wu Wei is joined by Holland Baroque

comparison, standard pop arrangements featured here, such as Paul Simon's 'The Sound of Silence', Leonard Cohen's 'Famous Blue Raincoat' or The Moody Blues' 'Nights in White Satin' fare less well, sounding altogether more clichéd and predictable.

With the focus very much on the songs themselves, it's easy to lose sight of the sound of Miloš's guitar, especially when it takes a back seat in arrangements such as in Radiohead's 'Street Spirit'. Perhaps with this in mind, the remaining tracks on the album focus on the kind of standard classical guitar core repertoire that propelled Miloš into the limelight in the first place, such as Francisco Tárrega's 'Oremus' and 'Endecha' (to which he imparts an attractive dancelike twist) or Pujol's 'Milonga', where one senses that the musically omnivorous Montenegrin guitarist remains at his most comfortable and assured. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

'South of the Circle'

Bjarnason *Stillshot* **Ragnarsdóttir** *Fair Flowers*
Sigurðsson *Nebraska* **Sveinbjarnardóttir**
Opacity **Tómasson** *Serimonia*
Siggi Quartet
 Sono Luminus © DSL92232 (60' • DDD)



So far as I am aware, the only previous outing on disc by the Siggi Quartet (formed in 2012) was accompanying Víkingur Ólafsson on his Philip Glass disc (DG, 4/17). This new issue from Sono Luminus is their first complete disc and for it they have chosen five Icelandic works composed within the last eight years. The most familiar among the composers are Haukur Tómasson, winner of the 2004 Nordic Council's Music Prize, and Daniel Bjarnason, whose *Stillshot* (2015) opens the programme. Tómasson's *Serimonia* (2014, revised in 2018 for this recording) is a single-span study in texture – or, rather, five textures, which intertwine and overlap through its nine minutes. Mamiko Dis Ragnarsdóttir's *Fair Flowers* (2018) is more extended, taking as its point of departure a painting of flowers; yet, if one considers works inspired by flowers by, say, Mahler, Puccini, Langgaard even, Ragnarsdóttir's sounds oddly dismal.

There is nothing dismal, however, about Valgeir Sigurðsson's *Nebraska*

(2011), a four-movement imagining of landscapes he had not seen: 'Flat Water'; 'Landlocked'; 'Erosion'; 'Plainsong'. Almost as appealing is *Opacity* (2014), another four-movement work, by the Siggi's leader Una Sveinbjarnardóttir, in which each of the quartet's members dominate a movement in turn: second violin the opening 'More', the cello the second span, 'Opacity' – in my view the finest of the four – and the viola the haunting 'Elegi'. Sveinbjarnardóttir herself is centre stage for the concluding, part-improvised 'Less' (the titles of the framing movements nicely whimsical). However experimental, the sense of dialogue between the four musicians is at its strongest in this compelling suite, all the more vivid for following after *Stillshot*, where it is almost totally absent. The Siggi Quartet have excellent ensemble and intonation and their performances throughout sound very well prepared, captured in first-rate sound.

Guy Rickards

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Gary Graffman

Jed Distler profiles the nonagenarian American pianist who overcame a serious hand condition to continue making music and teach a remarkable diversity of outstanding artists

Born in New York to Russian émigrés on October 14, 1928, Gary Graffman belongs to a generation of pianists who began to make their professional mark in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Within this coterie was a group of fellow piano students that, along with Graffman, included Claude Frank, Jacob Lateiner, Eugene Istomin and Leon Fleisher. They regularly played for and critiqued each other, held marathon sightreading sessions, and discussed pianistic matters into the wee hours, taking advantage of the Graffman family apartment's two pianos. In his 1981 memoir *I Really Should be Practicing*, Graffman famously dubbed this group the 'OYAPs', an acronym for Outstanding Young American Pianists, whose unofficial ranks, of course, expanded far and beyond the original 'gang of five'.

Although Graffman was not a wunderkind, he admitted to playing extremely well for a child, partly owing to his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music with Isabelle Vengerova, a redoubtable taskmaster. His father, Vladimir Graffman, a highly esteemed violin teacher in his own right, carefully supervised his son's studies, imparting such techniques as slow practice with separate hands that proved to have practical, long-term benefits.

Living on New York's Upper West Side offered easy access to Carnegie Hall, where the young Graffman's impressionable ears soaked up piano legends like Sergey Rachmaninov, Josef Hofmann, Arthur Rubinstein and Artur Schnabel, along with future mentors Rudolf Serkin and Vladimir Horowitz. In retrospect, however, it seems clear that life among the OYAPs gave decisive shape to Graffman's musical and pianistic outlook, abetted by the literal-minded zeitgeist that began to hold sway

among US-based instrumentalists, conductors and orchestras in the mid-20th century.

Discussing the OYAPs in tandem with the slightly older William Kapell, music critic Harris Goldsmith cited characteristics such as clarity over sensuality, a preference for 'crew-cut' brilliance of definition, a certain high-powered (some call it 'driven') intensity and a hard-grained approach to sonority that at times verged on percussiveness. What is more, Graffman and his peers took to heart Mahler's and Toscanini's oft-quoted adage that 'tradition is the last bad performance'.

One telling instance of the latter concerns Schumann's *Carnaval*, a staple of Graffman's early repertoire. Most

pianists played the 'Chopin' movement lyrically, and even more so upon the repeat. The 16-year-old Graffman would have none of that, and during a performance at Curtis he positively pounced upon the movement in accordance with the composer's *Agitato* directive, his teacher aghast. Likewise, Graffman's 1964 recording of the movement reflects Schumann's 'Chopin' rather than Vengerova's. Graffman's textual rectitude extended to his stereo remake of Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy*, where he made use of a newly available revised edition, and duly incorporated a D natural rather than an inauthentic D sharp in the tremolo figure closing the slow section.

Conversely, Graffman did not hesitate to reinforce certain sparse textures in Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. And in Tchaikovsky's Second Piano Concerto, he came up with a novel and practical textual solution cited in our Essential Recording box. Perhaps Balakirev's daunting *Islamey* encompasses Graffman's peak achievement in Russian repertoire, the pianist's

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1946 – *The start of a career*

Graffman graduates from the Curtis Institute, shortly afterwards making his professional solo debut with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Three years later he wins the prestigious Leventritt Competition, where awards were given sparingly.

•1952 – *Marlboro Festival residency and marriage*

On George Szell's advice to explore chamber music, Graffman spends summer 1952 at Marlboro, both studying and collaborating with artistic director and pianist Rudolf Serkin. He marries Naomi Helfman: partner, collaborator and editor till her death, June 17, 2019.

•1955 – *First recordings*

On October 31, Graffman begins sessions at New York's Webster Hall for his commercial recording debut, resulting in recordings of Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy* and Prokofiev's Sonatas Nos 2 and 3.

•1964 – *Taking a stand*

After learning that two black students have been arrested as they sought admission to a concert in Jackson, Mississippi, Graffman cancels his upcoming recital at the venue in protest at its policy of segregating audiences by race. In solidarity, other artists asked to substitute for Graffman refuse to do so.

•1981 – *I Really Should be Practicing*

Doubleday publishes the memoir *I Really Should be Practicing: Reflections on the Pleasures and Perils of Playing the Piano in Public*. Graffman proves to be a vivid and insightful raconteur as he recalls past and present teachers, friends and colleagues.

•1996 – *A notable premiere*

Having refocused his playing on works for piano left hand, Graffman partners with his similarly afflicted longtime friend Leon Fleisher in the premiere of William Bolcom's *Gaea*.

•2006 – *Honoured at the Curtis Institute of Music*

The Graffmans' longstanding commitment to Curtis (Gary joined the faculty in 1980 and later became its director and president) is honoured with the dedication of the Gary and Naomi Graffman Common Room and the creation of the Gary and Naomi Graffman Scholarship Fund.



straightforward musicality and ironclad technique matched by powerful projection.

Sony Classical's 2013 reissue of Graffman's 'Complete RCA and Columbia Album Collection' (24 discs; 1/14) restored a number of long-unavailable items that further illuminated this pianist's artistry, especially among younger generations of listeners who had never heard him before. His forthright and cumulatively uplifting traversals of Beethoven's Opp 110 and 111 sonatas easily hold their own and then some in a crowded catalogue. Excitement and integrity happily fuse in Graffman's classic Prokofiev Third and Tchaikovsky First concerto collaborations with George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra. As with his OYAP

brothers, Graffman set reference-worthy standards in Brahms's *Handel* Variations, while his alternately impassioned and introspective music-making captures both the angst and the tenderness inherent throughout Brahms's First Concerto.

It's a pity Graffman did not record Brahms's Second Concerto, a work he was struggling with during a 1979

practice session. His wife couldn't help but notice more and more mistakes creeping into his playing over the preceding years, while Graffman confessed that his right-hand ring and pinky fingers had grown progressively feeble. Focal dystonia was diagnosed after numerous medical appointments and tests. Graffman retreated from two-handed performance, focusing instead on old and new music for the left hand, subsequently inspiring a wealth of new commissions.

While studying with Horowitz in the 1950s, the legendary virtuoso stressed the importance to Graffman of gauging his sound to reach his listeners over the footlights, and, above all else, listening to himself and being himself. These tenets

have informed Graffman's long and distinct teaching legacy. The fact that he has produced well-known students as musically and temperamentally different from one other as Lang Lang, Yuja Wang, Ignat Solzhenitsyn and Haochen Zhang speaks for itself, and is central to the scope of what has amounted to an improbable yet most fulfilling career. 

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 2
Graffman *pf* Philadelphia Orch / Ormandy
Sony Classical

The first unambiguously great recording of this underrated piece stands out for Graffman's consistently clear, honest fingerwork and intelligent textual syntheses: he uses Tchaikovsky's

unabridged original score in the outer movements, but opts for the 'traditional' Siloti version for the slow movement. In turn, Ormandy and his players check their patented lushness and sensuality at the studio door in favour of atypically gaunt, line-orientated support.

Instrumental



Lindsay Kemp on Scott Ross's sadly curtailed Bach survey:

'I seriously wonder if anyone has ever played harpsichord fugues more excitingly' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 70](#)



Harriet Smith finds much to enjoy in Mark Viner's Thalberg:

'If you've never encountered Halévy's opera Charles VI then fret not – Thalberg offers a whistle-stop tour of the action' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 76](#)

JS Bach • M Brown • Kodály

JS Bach Solo Cello Suite No 6, BWV1012

M Brown Suite **Kodály** Solo Cello Sonata, Op 6

Matthew Zalkind vc

Avie ④ AV2406 (76' • DDD)



By choosing two of the most demanding works in the solo cello repertoire for his recording debut, Matthew Zalkind seems to be laying all his cards on the table – and I'm delighted to report that he shows a winning hand. The American cellist's interpretation of Bach's Sixth Suite (played on a traditional four-string instrument rather than the five-string violoncello piccolo) is sensitively phrased, shaped not only according to the music's variegated melodic topography but also in accordance with its harmonic ebb and flow. Zalkind has a warm tone and excellent intonation, his generous application of legato doesn't preclude clear articulation and his supple and expressive rubato harks back to Casals's pioneering account. I'm deeply touched by his rapt playing in the Allemande, as well as by his heartfelt reading of the Sarabande – listen, for instance, to how he caresses the double-stops at 2'08". But what impresses me most is the sheer joyousness he communicates in every movement.

In Kodály's sprawling Sonata, Zalkind's favour isn't as incendiary as, say, Bengtsson (Danacord) or Weilerstein (Decca, 1/15). He takes his time in the opening *Allegro maestoso ma appassionato*, really taking the *maestoso* directive to heart. Indeed, there's an epic quality to Zalkind's reading, and his plaintive tone in highly-lying lyrical passages has an almost keening quality that carries an unexpected whiff of tragedy. The *Adagio*, too, is conceived on a grand scale, starting with a fearsome, slow crescendo. He seems to think of phrasing in terms of gestures that make both rhetorical and dramatic sense, and in the finale this thoughtfulness is evident in the

way he picks up and carries melodic threads through the music's intricate fabric.

Michael Brown's Bach-inspired Suite sounds a little flimsy placed between these two masterworks but works well enough as an interlude. The second movement, an 'Improvisational Sarabande', uses repetition on both a large and small scale to create a clever house of mirrors, but it's the herky-jerky energy of the final Gigue that satisfies most. Zalkind plays it with conviction. All in all, this is a most auspicious debut.

Andrew Farach-Colton

JS Bach

Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr' – BWV711; BWV715; BWV717. Chorale Partita on 'Ach was soll ich Sünder machen?', BWV770. Fantasia and Fugue, BWV537. Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend – BWV709; BWV726. Passacaglia and Fugue, BWV582. Preludes and Fugues – BWV531; BWV546. Toccata, BWV566a

Masaaki Suzuki org

BIS ④ BIS2421 (79' • DDD/DSD)

Played on the 1714 Gottfried Silbermann organ of Freiberg Cathedral



If Masaaki Suzuki's sacred cantata series was necessarily chronological,

clearly evident in this new journey – on the basis of the three volumes so far – is how the architecture of the programming is built on narratives amalgamating all of Bach's organ-writing genres: the *stylus phantasticus* of preludes, toccatas, fantasias and fugues intersecting closely with all forms of chorale preludes, variations and miscellany.

In this regard, Suzuki is a class act in every component of his planning. All roads lead to the great Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor but we reach this peak through both a subtle manipulation of the magnetic tonal worlds of C major and C minor, and striking contrasts of quasi-juvenilia (for example, the freewheeling and surging peels of the early Böhm-inspired Prelude

and Fugue in C) and mature masterpieces – of which the equivalent work in C minor allows us the first gaze towards the promised land of the Passacaglia.

Yet Suzuki's greatest challenge lies in taming the remarkably evergreen and resourceful Silbermann organ in Freiberg Cathedral. He draws on all its inherent glories: the dazzling couplers, the earthy French reeds, luminous flutes and those specifically German concentrated chests of projected sound and hearty, marauding bass lines. Suzuki's skill in imaginative registration is heard to beautiful effect in the chorale partita (a genre of variation for which Bach wrote three distinguished examples) *Ach was soll ich Sünder machen*. That the work's authenticity is questionable matters not a jot.

Likewise, Suzuki brings wonderful emollience to the first chorale on 'Herr Jesu Christ' (BWV709) but it's the big C minor works that bring aspirational zeal to this volume. The Prelude and Fugue is fully charged with nervous energy and inexorable purpose, while the Passacaglia is a masterclass in keeping powder dry, knowing when to light the various fuses and being infectiously consequential. For all Bach lovers, not just organists!

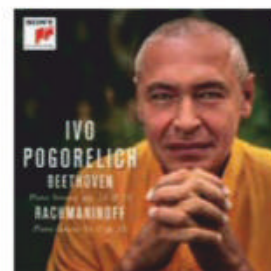
Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Beethoven • Rachmaninov

Beethoven Piano Sonatas – No 22, Op 54; No 24, Op 78 **Rachmaninov** Piano Sonata No 2, Op 36

Ivo Pogorelich pf

Sony Classical ④ 19075 95660-2 (54' • DDD)



I've rarely encountered such an ugly-sounding piano release. While the engineering

admirably captures Ivo Pogorelich's wide dynamic scope, his sonority ranges from hollow-sounding in soft passages to a strident and metallic patina elsewhere that proves fatiguing and difficult to endure. So does the pianist's relentless time-stretching and rhetorical underlining



Suggestive and voluptuous: Imogen Cooper brings an understated mastery to music from France and Spain – see review on page 76

throughout the first movement of Beethoven's Op 78. The basic tempo heaves and billows, where Pogorelich's *Luftpausen* and caesuras grow increasingly predictable to the point of cliché. The pianist controls the *Allegro vivace*'s rapid passagework superbly – his shading of the composer's sudden shifts between major and minor, for example – but his elongation of the opening motif serves no expressive or structural purpose beyond caricature.

After subjecting Op 54's graceful first-movement main theme to pompous strutting (those unsubtle down-beat accents belabour the obvious), Pogorelich speeds up and bludgeons the poor triplets to a bloody pulp. It's also hard to listen past the close-up and oppressive sound in order to appreciate Pogorelich's occasional nods to the toccata-like second movement's cross-rhythmic phrase groupings.

Although the rhapsodic style of Rachmaninov's Second Sonata can usually absorb the caprices of subjective interpreters such as Horowitz or Weissenberg, Pogorelich's habitual arrhythmia and sectionalised approach to articulation and texture yield a

fragmented and shapeless landscape, albeit one full of striking details and gestures.

There was a time when this pianist's unorthodox notions conveyed remarkable musical insights bordering on revelation, such as in Brahms's Intermezzos and Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*. However, on the basis of his first release in decades, he's clearly assumed a new identity: 'Ego Pogorelich'. **Jed Distler**

Chopin • Liszt

Chopin Études, Op 10 – No 1; No 2; No 4 **Liszt** Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude, S173 No 3. Consolations, S172. Grands études, S137 – No 9; No 10. Six Polish Songs after Chopin, S480

Mariam Batsashvili *pf*

Warner Classics © 9029 54278-6 (70' • DDD)



Probably the most attractive part of Mariam Batsashvili's latest offering is the Liszt *Six Polish Songs after Chopin*. These arrangements are a true meeting of minds – between the (hypothetical) folk originals, Chopin's discreet musical

embodiments of them and Liszt's typically flamboyant maximalisations of Chopin. The Georgian-born pianist leaves nothing to be desired in the generous warmth of her interpretations.

The balancing set of six *Consolations* is likewise sensitive and refined throughout. Some phrases could, admittedly, be more daringly shaped. At no point did the playing make me hold my breath. But there is much to be said for the honest sensitivity and singing tone brought to bear here.

Rather less successful, I feel, are the five Études that complete the disc. Not that Batsashvili is technically embarrassed by any of their demands, and not that she isn't able to illuminate them with some personal touches. But there are many alternative recordings with a greater wow factor, and the particular choice of pieces doesn't strike me as in any way revelatory.

Reviewing her disc of transcriptions a while back (Cobra, 2/17), I mentioned that Batsashvili deserved a better recorded environment. This she has certainly been given by Warner Classics, and despite my reservations it's clear that she has much to offer as a recording artist. **David Fanning**

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

SCOTT ROSS'S BACH

Lindsay Kemp enjoys the Bach-playing of a maverick harpsichordist who died tragically young, before the project could be completed



The music just flowed out of him: Scott Ross plays Bach with clarity and vitality

JS Bach

'Keyboard Works'

Complete Bach recordings for Erato, plus broadcast performances from French, Swiss and Canadian Radio

Scott Ross hpd.org

Erato © 11 9029 54584-2 (12h 43' • DDD)

Recorded 1976-88



'Mixture of rascally thug and dandy' is how one reminiscence

describes Scott Ross, and when one hears stories of his liking for giving recitals in lumberjacket and jeans, or of otherwise showing disarming disdain for conventional concert practice, one can begin to see why. The photos in this 11-CD box show him variously looking like John Lennon ('70s version), smooth-groomed but moodily turned away from the camera, or addressing us with the hard-as-nails stare of Michael Caine in *Get Carter* mode. The

reminiscence also mentions 'a great sense of humour', much of which seems to have expressed itself in pretending he didn't care about anything much when in fact he did care, and practised and thought hard. The images here suggest a prickly character, maybe, but also a deeply determined one.

For many, Ross is the harpsichordist who recorded all 555 of the Scarlatti sonatas, a monumental feat achieved in 16 months in the mid-1980s. For some, he is the great lost star of the harpsichord. His death in 1989 at the age of 38 from HIV-related pneumonia not only curtailed the complete cycle of Bach's harpsichord works he had embarked upon – and which forms the starting point for this box – but also robbed us of the chance to continue feeling the closeness and relevance of his art. Today his short career is remembered for its brilliance and, to a lesser extent, eccentricity. His memory is still revered, but as time moves on and fashions change, our appreciation of his actual music-making becomes less and less exact.

Ross was born in Pittsburgh in 1951 but moved to Nice with his parents when he was 14. Starting on the piano, he gravitated towards the organ and then the harpsichord, and in 1971 won a rarely awarded First Prize at the Bruges International Harpsichord Competition. Despite that, he found it difficult at first to build a career, and for several years taught at the Laval University School of Music in Quebec. In 1983 he returned to France, living in a tiny rented house in the grounds of the Chateau d'Assas, near Montpellier, where he kept company with cats, orchids and the wondrous 'Donzelague' harpsichord he had already used for complete recordings of Rameau and Couperin. He also signed for Erato, for which the Scarlatti was made, and eventually began the Bach project which, on the evidence of what is in this box, promised much.

Ross knew he did not have long to live when he set out on it, and it is remarkable that he got as far as he did, recording between January and June 1988 the three harpsichord volumes of the *Clavierübung* – which is to say the Partitas, the *Italian Concerto* and *French Overture* and the *Goldberg Variations* (this last for EMI Angel) – as well as the *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*. These four discs are the only original commercial recordings in the box and they stand as exemplars of Ross's special talent. While not completely note-perfect, they reveal a technique of great precision and poise that allows him to express himself naturally without exaggeration or gimmick; indeed, given his reputation, many first-time listeners may be surprised to find how restrained his playing can seem, how lacking in rubato, extra ornamentation or other flamboyant gestures. Watch him on YouTube and you'll see how still he sits, how smoothly unhurried his hands are. 'With that combination of stability and the particular poise of his arms and hands', a former student recalls in the booklet, 'the music just flowed out of him', and that is very much the impression you get here, especially in the allemandes and courantes that he runs by us with elegant legato.

What really creeps up on you, however, is his mastery of complex-textured fast pieces. The gigue in the Partitas compel attention in a way that is not obvious at first but which rests in the clarity and shape he gets from subtle and effective use of articulation, constantly letting in light and keeping the music vital. The Fifth Gigue is a stunning example, as is the

Chromatic Fugue, but there are plenty more throughout this box – in fact, I seriously wonder if anyone has ever played harpsichord fugues more excitingly.

It's sad then, that the next Bach on his list, which he didn't get it to, was *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Erato attempts to compensate by including a complete recording made for Radio Canada in 1980, in which Ross's ability to enliven a rugged fugue with crossfiring articulations is also on show. Some of the preludes are a little staid, however, and one is left wondering how different they might have sounded 10 years on. Certainly one would hope that a commercial recording would have had more wrong notes edited out, and sourced a more generous-toned harpsichord.

The rest of the set is made up of further radio recordings, most of which have been posthumously issued on CD before, including a concert *Goldbergs* recorded in Ottawa in 1985. This is a good find; although not hugely different from the 1988 studio, it is consistently that little bit faster, giving it pleasing momentum. (It is also very accurate.) I like the insouciant way Ross plays the Aria, dancelike and apparently unweighted by thoughts of what is to come. This is perhaps overdone in the later version, but both of these performances are impressive accounts of this great piece.

One disc contains rarities and first releases, all from live recordings. Some (such as the Third *English Suite*) are ruinously noisy, and some (such as a stodgy F minor Harpsichord Concerto) should have been left where they were. But there is a joyous two-harpsichord arrangement by Ross's second teacher Kenneth Gilbert of the Sixth *Brandenburg* (in which he is joined by his first teacher Huguette Grémy-Chauliac), while exciting performances of three of the Toccatas make you wish he had got round to them in the studio.

Ross's organ output is relatively little-known, though he apparently thought of it as his first instrument. There are two discs of it here, including a few CD premieres. Again one is struck by the technical control and clarity of his playing, even if some of the instruments, mainly Canadian '60s-builds, are somewhat lacking in grand character.

Although more of a mixed bag than it at first appears, this collection is a valuable celebration of a fascinating talent. **G**

Chopin

Ballade No 1, Op 23. Barcarolle, Op 60. Four Mazurkas, Op 24. Nocturnes – No 8, Op 27 No 2; No 13, Op 48 No 1; No 20, Op *posth*. Piano Sonata No 2, Op 35. Polonaise No 6, Op 53

Chen Xue-Hong *pf*

Accentus ⑤ ACC304651 (69' • DDD)

Recorded live at Église Saint-Marcellin de Névache, France, August 2018

Schumann

Abegg Variations, Op 1. Humoreske, Op 20.

Piano Sonata No 1, Op 11

Zhang Cheng *pf*

Accentus ⑤ ACC304652 (66' • DDD)

Recorded live at Église Saint-Marcellin de Névache, France, August 2018

Scriabin

Piano Sonatas – No 1, Op 6; No 5, Op 53;

No 6, Op 62; No 8, Op 66

Chen Yunjie *pf*

Accentus ⑤ ACC304653 (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at Paliesiaus Dvaras, Lithuania, March 2019



These three new discs from Accentus are the fruits of a partnership with Académie France-Chine, launched in 2018 by pianist Zhu Xiao-Mei with support from Cartier. The Academy's purpose is to 'promote music education and training, to encourage the emergence of highly talented young artists and to foster cultural exchange between Europe and China'. Chen Xue-Hong's Chopin and Zhang Cheng's Schumann were recorded live in August 2018 at the Festival de la Haute-Clarée in Hautes-Alpes, France; Chen Yunjie's Scriabin was recorded live in Paliesiaus Dvaras, Lithuania, in March 2019. The technical values of the recordings are uniformly excellent – as is indeed the technical equipment of these three young pianists. All essay ambitious programmes of their chosen composers, which they deliver with a high degree of pianistic polish.

Chen Xue-Hong, a native of Gansu, attended the Beijing Central Conservatory, where he continues his studies alongside concert-giving. At 20, he seems to be the

youngest of these three pianists. His all-Chopin programme is perhaps the most varied here, though a certain rhetorical uncertainty or ambiguity can occasionally send his interpretations far off their mark.

Zhang Cheng attended Shenzhen Conservatory, Texas Christian University and the Universität der Künste in Berlin and took first prize at the 2011 Clara Haskil Competition in Vevey. His Schumann programme is a model of preternatural clarity, though he can be relentless in some of the composer's more obsessive rhythmic patterns. If the First Sonata is strikingly uneven, his *Humoreske* is deeply persuasive.

Chen Yunjie's early training was at the Shanghai Conservatory, followed by the Manhattan School of Music, Juilliard School and Cleveland Institute. He now teaches at the Central Conservatory in Beijing. Though his programme ranges from early to late Scriabin, the common emotional trajectory he brings to these four sonatas tends to diminish their individuality.

It will be interesting to observe the efficacy of the Académie France-Chine beyond its impressive inaugural season.

Patrick Rucker

Czerny

Die Kunst des Präludierens, Op 300

Kolja Lessing *pf*

CPO ⑤ ② CPO555 169-2 (116' • DDD)

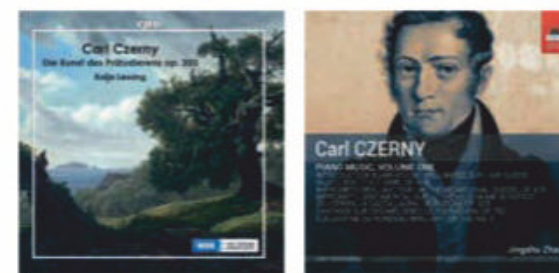
Czerny

'Piano Music, Vol 1'

L'écho des Alpes, Suisses, Livre 2 – No 1, Introduction et Variations brillantes sur l'air suisse Alles liebt/Tout aime, Op 428; No 2, Impromptu brillant sur un thème national suisse, Op 429. Fantaisie sur des mélodies de Beethoven, Op 752. Hommage aux dames, Op 136 – No 2, Élégantine ou Rondeau brillant. Impromptu sentimental sur le thème 'O nume benefico' de l'opéra 'La gazza ladra' de Rossini, Op 523

Jingshu Zhao *pf*

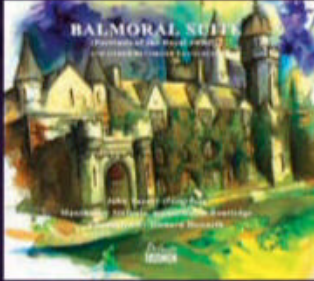
Toccata Classics ⑤ TOCC0020 (66' • DDD)



The 'invention' of the solo recital is generally credited to Liszt on the basis of his 1839 letter, written from Italy to Cristina Belgiojoso in Paris, in which he describes playing in public for the first time without assisting artists. Less well known is the fact that, for much of the 'long 19th century', pianists sat down at the



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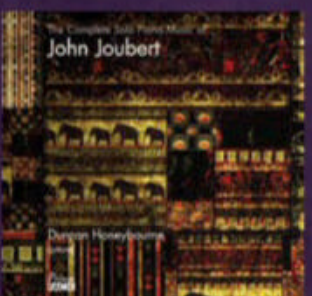
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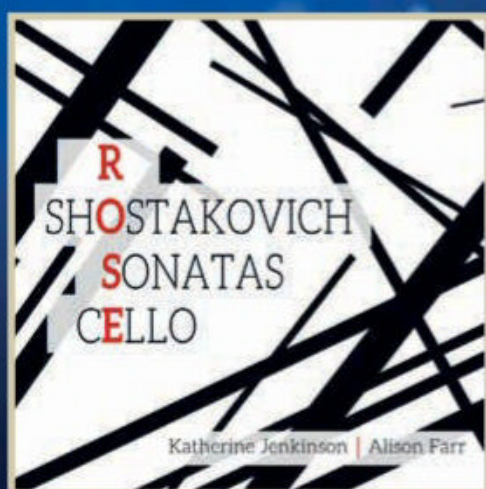
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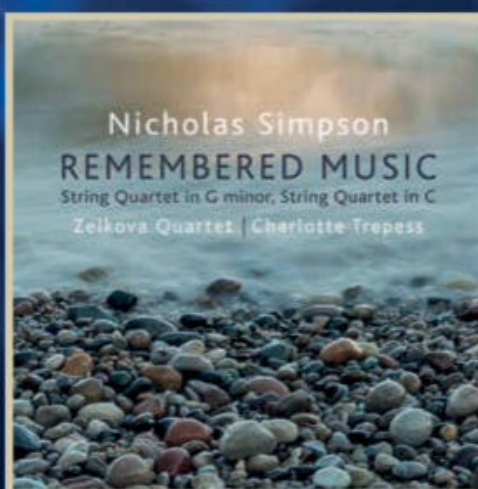
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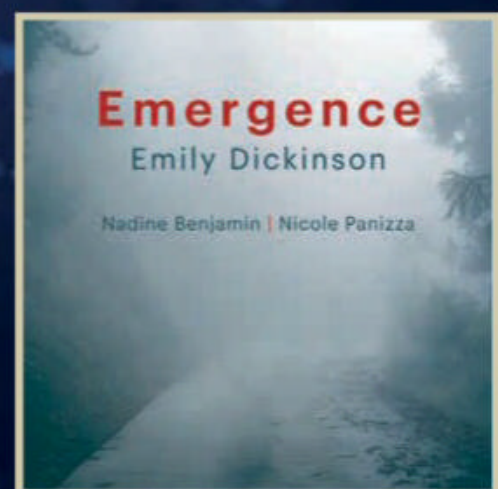
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instrument and noodled about a bit, getting a feel for the piano and the acoustics of the room – a practice called ‘preluding’ – before launching into the work they intended to share with their listeners.

In 1833 Diabelli published Carl Czerny’s Op 300, a collection of appropriate examples of the practice, as *The Art of Preluding*, advertised as ‘Part Two’ of *A Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte*, Op 200. Kolja Lessing, the Karlsruhe-born violinist and pianist who now teaches in Stuttgart, has recorded Czerny’s preludes in a two-disc set for CPO. Lessing’s unfailingly musical performances reveal the breadth of musical culture, both historical and contemporary, that Czerny brought to these miniatures, a few of which could be small stand-alone compositions.

Also impressive is their stylistic variety. One finds, for instance, mini-overtures appropriate to Bach, others that might introduce a work of Mozart, as well as those that might preface a sonata by Clementi or Beethoven. Well crafted as they are, these preludes also serve as examples of what might be improvised, rather than as cut-and-dried addenda ready for attachment to a piece in performance. That said, this is 116 minutes of music which, as a compelling listening experience, will probably correlate directly to one’s interest in historical performance practice.

It may seem odd that a compendium of 121 essentially functional exemplars, 89 of which are less than a minute in length, is more stylish and satisfyingly expressive than a group of fully developed, finished pieces meant for concert use, but such is the case. At issue here is neither Czerny’s compositional skill nor the intrinsic value of the music, but of the performances on the second of these two releases. Jingshu Zhao’s readings of Czerny’s variations, impromptus, fantasies and rondos suggest not so much that she is temperamentally unsuited to the aesthetics of early 19th-century opera and popular tunes as reflected in piano music of the period but that she is ignorant of them. No one would argue that she is not equal to the sometimes significant technical challenges Czerny poses. On the other hand, one listens in vain for some differentiation between the lyrical and the dramatic, the profound and the trivial or, indeed, any decisive characterisation at all. Musical events file past in imperturbable equanimity, strangers to joy or sadness, bland and colourless. If it’s living, breathing Czerny you’re after, Martin Jones’s sonata series on Nimbus or the

piano trios by Shin, Hayek and Gingher on Naxos are probably better bets.

Patrick Rucker

Dall’Aquila · Henning

‘Bella incognita’

Dall’Aquila La battaglia. Caelorum regina.

La Cara Cossa. Caro-a-H-HE. Dorian Ricercar.

Fantasia. Frottolesca. Hypodorian Ricercar.

Hypolydian Ricercar. Il est bel et bon. Nous

bergiers. Phrygian Ricercar. Priambolesca.

Senza canto. Sesquialtera Ricercar. Solfamifa

Ricercar. Tocha la canella. La Traditora

Henning La compagna. La Santa Anna.

Senza contrabasso. Senza mezana

Lukas Henning lute

Glossa © GCD923518 (54’ • DDD)



Suggestion trumps explicitness. Think Fragonard’s *L’escarpolette* or

Herrick’s ‘A sweet disorder in the dress / Kindles in clothes a wantonness’. And isn’t the lute the instrument of suggestion par excellence?

Lukas Henning’s lively booklet and video essays (musicamemo.com) set the scene for his recital of music by the enigmatic Italian lutenist-composer Marco Dall’Aquila (c1480-after 1538). They touch on Pietro Aretino’s erotic poetry and Marcantonio Raimondi’s pornographic prints in *I modi*; Pietro Areno’s theories on the affects and musical modes; and *La tempesta*, the mysterious masterpiece of Dall’Aquila’s lute student, the painter Giorgione.

Henning organises Dall’Aquila’s ricercares, dances, etc, as well as compositions from his own pen, into four suites of six. The ricercar – a precursor to the fantasia – is central, and kinship with Montaigne’s later conception of the essay is not far-fetched. But where Dall’Aquila accumulates ideas within schemas, Henning begins from a generous mythology, showering an abundance of ideas as he moves.

For example, the robustness of the opening ricercar – of the piece’s Phrygian mode, Henning quotes Areno as saying it ‘fires up the spirits and kindles anger’ – contrasts sharply with Henning’s composition *La Santa Anna*, inspired by Leonardo’s painting. This not through any primitive demonstrability; rather, through subtle shifts in tempo, in tonal shading, in agogics.

The contrasts between the later Hypodorian and Hypolydian ricercares, with their respectively major and minor implications, are even more refined. The

two magnificent performances with which the recital ends – of the *Fantasia de Maestro Marcho da Laquila* (sic) and Dall’Aquila’s arrangement of Janequin’s *La battaglia* – seal the deal. **William Yeoman**

Kapsperger

‘Intavolatura di chitarone’

Libro primo d’intavolatura di chitarrone – excs.

Libro quarto d’intavolatura di chitarrone – excs

Jonas Nordberg theorbo

BIS © BIS2417 (70’ • DDD/DSD)



In his *Musurgia universalis, sive Ars magna consoni et dissoni* (1650), that

wildly imaginative polymath Athanasius Kircher all but proclaims Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger (c1580-1651) the Apollo of the theorbo, such is his unqualified endorsement of the Italian composer and lutenist’s talent and originality. It’s hard not to agree with him. That Kapsperger’s music for solo theorbo, or chitarrone, is – if you’ll forgive the pun – endlessly captivating is due to its strangeness as much as to its beauty.

Indeed, taking Kapsperger’s toccatas alone, one recalls Kircher’s own bizarre, wide-ranging publications, all but *Wunderkammer* in print. The sudden shifts in mood, in rhythm, in tonality, in texture, often within a very short time frame, by turns bewilder and beguile. Especially when performed by a fine musician such as Jonas Nordberg, who even manages to remind us that the music of Kapsperger’s contemporary Frescobaldi is never far away. Nordberg focuses on the quasi-autobiographical late works of Kapsperger’s *Libro quarto d’intavolatura di chitarrone* (1640), contrasting these with music from the composer’s first book of pieces for chitarrone, published some 35 years earlier.

The opening work, the *Toccata primo* from the fourth book, is labyrinthine, not because of any arcane counterpoint but owing to the alarming attenuation and compression of time itself, through rapid, serpentine figurations and slow, stately progressions, and everything in between. There follow equally novel passacaglias, galliards and other dances, an air and variations ... even an actual self-portrait, *Kapsperger*. Upon all these Nordberg, playing a darkly pungent 14-course theorbo by Lars Jönsson after Tieffenbrucker, lavishes a rare artistry that not only Kapsperger but Kircher would surely have appreciated. **William Yeoman**

C Schumann

Sterndale Bennett Andante cantabile **Brahms** Serenades: No 1, Op 11 – Menuetto; No 2, Op 16 – Scherzo **C Schumann** Albumblatt über 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott' **R Schumann** Eleven Songs. Genoveva – Overture. Four Sketches. Four Studies (all transcr C Schumann)

Jozef De Beenhouwer *pf*

Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG903 2115-6 (73' • DDD/DSD)

'Clara Schumann and her Family'

Bargiel Bagatelles, Op 4 – No 1; No 2.

Charakterstück, Op 1 No 2. Drei Fantasiestücke, Op 9 **Brahms** Serenade, Op 11 – Menuetto (arr C Schumann) **C Schumann** Ich hab' in deinem Auge, Op 13 No 5 (arr Liszt). Quatre Pièces fugitives, Op 15 – No 1, Larghetto; No 4, Scherzo. Romance (1853) **R Schumann** Liederkreis, Op 39 – excs. Schlummerlied, Op 124 No 16. Study, Op 56 No 4. Wunsch (all arr C Schumann)

Ira Maria Witoschynskyj *pf*

Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG604 0729-2 (61' • DDD)



These two CDs focus on an area of Clara Schumann's output which is every bit as interesting (some would say more so) than her original works: her accomplished and surprisingly numerous transcriptions.

When I welcomed Isata Kanneh-Mason's Clara Schumann disc (Decca, 8/19), I made special mention of her ingenious but literal transcription of 30 of her husband's songs and expressed a hope that others might dig out the remaining numbers. Here we are with a disc that includes a further six from that collection, another duplicated on Kanneh-Mason's disc and four more from a collection of 11 discarded song transcriptions that did not see the light of day until 2012.

The rest of the programme is of Clara's reworkings of seven of Robert's *Studies for the Pedal Pianoforte*, the Overture to his opera *Genoveva* (a transcription that pianistically ventures hardly beyond Grade 7), an *Andante cantabile* by the Schumanns' friend Sterndale Bennett reduced by Clara from four to two hands, and two short movements from the works of another friend, Brahms. The latter two were also not printed until 2012 and, like the majority of works here, are first recordings.

The Belgian pianist Jozef De Beenhouwer is not, frankly, a compelling communicator of arresting individuality, rather a reliable and proficient artist, qualities that serve him well in his mission of promulgating Clara's works: unshowy, conservative and just a little bit worthy. The same is true of Ira Maria Witoschynskyj playing a Steinway Model D of 1901, a reissue of an MDG recording made back in 1996 when, to the great credit of the pianist, 14 of the 17 tracks were premieres. Among these are two titles common to both discs (one of the *Studies for Pedal Piano* and the Menuetto from Brahms's Serenade, Op 11) and four of the transcriptions of her husband's songs including 'Mondnacht' so beautifully recorded by Kanneh-Mason; in 'Frühlingsnacht' I found myself missing Liszt's more elaborate setting. Three of Clara's own modest but charming solos are also found a place. Somewhat anachronistically, Witoschynskyj includes Franz Liszt in Clara's 'family' (the two enjoyed a mutual antipathy). Liszt was generous enough to transcribe three of Clara's own songs, one of which is presented here. Three early works by Clara's half-brother Woldemar Bargiel follow, before his *Drei Fantasiestücke*, Op 9, dedicated to Clara and by far the most substantial works here. Brahms, whose F minor Sonata was published a year earlier in 1853, is hovering over Bargiel's shoulder.

Both discs are recorded to MDG's customary high standards and come with excellent booklets, but I can't help thinking that, despite the commendable advocacy of these two pianists, only a handful of the works will secure a permanent foothold in the repertoire when the bicentenary floodlights have been switched off.

Jeremy Nicholas

Schumann

Arabeske, Op 18. Fantasie, Op 17.

Faschingsschwank aus Wien, Op 26.

Papillons, Op 2

Joseph Tong *pf*

Quartz © QTZ2134 (75' • DDD)



Purely in terms of selections and running order, Joseph Tong's all-Schumann disc represents an ideal, well-balanced programme that judiciously represents this mercurial composer. I like the way Tong slightly varies his touch and phrasing in each iteration of the *Arabeske*'s main

theme, although one might take issue with his overly vehement treatment of the march episode. Such an approach better suits the C major *Fantasie*'s obsessive central movement, where Tong is strongest in the moments of lyrical respite, but he disappointingly holds back in the climactic coda. But he integrates the opening movement's disparate moods with masterful fluidity, and resists the common temptation to press ahead in the third movement's loudest passages; one can learn from Tong's steadiness and simplicity.

Tong brings impressive solidity and authority to the more orchestral writing in *Papillons*: for example, No 8's repeated block chords and No 10's evocations of hunting horns. But No 5 is too heavy and overly serious for such disarming music, and one could imagine No 4's bracing right-hand octaves with more suppleness.

Although Tong takes *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*'s opening *Allegro* at a relatively measured tread in comparison with, say, Richter or Anderszewski, his resolutely centred rhythm generates comparable drive and momentum. The same cannot be said, however, about Tong's stridently dragging and texturally monotonous finale. Note, too, his haunting deliberation in the Romanze, and a well-sprung Scherzino that unfortunately loses steam in the exciting final measures. Tong's slightly square reading of the Intermezzo undermines the music's impassioned undercurrents.

The main question is how an uneven release with many distinctive features will fare in a catalogue overrun with consistently great and more alluringly engineered Schumann interpretations. Such is the reality of the marketplace.

Jed Distler

Skalkottas

'From Berlin to Athens'

Fünfzehn Kleine Variationen. The Gnomes. Griechische Suite. Sonatina. (Suite). Suites Nos 2-4

Lorenda Ramou *pf*

BIS © BIS2364 (88' • DDD/DSD)



Eighty-eight minutes? Well, 87'43" of intelligently programmed piano music by Skalkottas, including three world premieres, complementing BIS's previous groundbreaking releases from Nikolaos Samaltanos (11/01) and Lorenda Ramou herself (12/06). The programme falls into three phases, not quite chronologically

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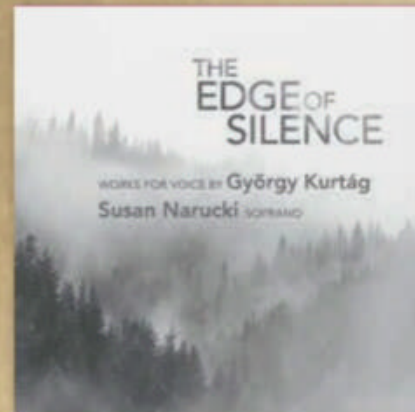
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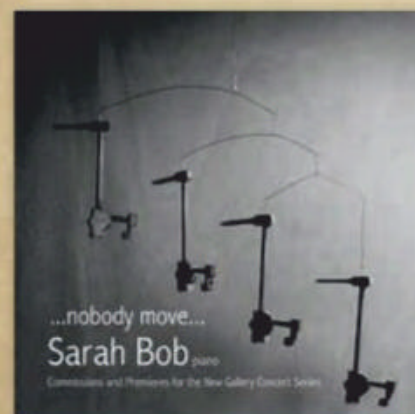
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arranged. First come four works from his Berlin student period: the delightful *Greek Suite* (1924), one of his earliest surviving compositions, a vibrant reflection of trends in Greek music of the time. Even more striking is the slightly incomplete piece known as (*Suite*) – the first two pages are missing – of the same year with its grave and haunting central *Molto moderato* and whimsical virtuoso finale, *Shimmy tempo*. (Skalkottas did ‘jazz’ – who knew?)

The *Sonatina* and *Fifteen Little Variations* date from 1927 and appeared in BIS’s series before. They show a growth in expressive and technical refinement in Skalkottas’s piano-writing, features which flowered in the works in the second part of the recital, *Suites Nos 2-4* (1940-41), composed in Athens. Unrelated to the *Suite No 1* (1936, 11/01), Nos 2-4 chart a stylistic move from expressionism to a more objective neoclassicism. Unlike the Berlin suites and *Sonatina*, these later works are all in four movements, more varied in format. Finally, from 1939, comes Skalkottas’s original dance suite for the children’s ballet *The Gnomes*, which Yannis Samprovalakis unearthed in 2015. It was rejected as too advanced for children and replaced by the more familiar score, based around arrangements of several pieces from Bartók’s *For Children* (3/05). Written in the hybrid manner combining nationalist and expressionist elements featured in other scores of the period, this is not top-drawer Skalkottas, perhaps, but is entertaining nonetheless.

Ramou navigates her way through these sometimes knotty scores, which she clearly knows inside-out, with consummate musicianship. The piano tone is warm and full although the over-resonant acoustic is not ideal (Samaltanos fared better). However, with BIS’s superb recorded sound, every nuance is captured in a constantly fascinating and rewarding issue. **Guy Rickards**

Sonatina, Variations – selected comparison:
Samaltanos (1/05) (BIS) BIS-CD1464

Thalberg

L’art du chant appliqué au piano, Op 70 – No 7, *Bella adorata incognita*, romance de l’opéra ‘Il giuramento’ de Mercadante; No 19, *Casta diva*, cavatine de l’opéra ‘Norma’ de Bellini. *Fantaisie sur des motifs de l’opéra ‘Les Huguenots’* de Meyerbeer, Op 20. *Grand caprice sur des motifs de l’opéra ‘Charles VI’* de F Halévy, Op 48. *Grand caprice sur la Marche de ‘L’Apothéose’* de Berlioz, Op 58. *Grande fantaisie sur des motifs de l’opéra ‘La Muette de Portici’* de DFE Auber, Op 52

Mark Viner *pf*

Piano Classics © PCL10178 (64’ • DDD)



Things didn’t begin too promisingly: I spent the first track pondering the genius of Liszt’s transcriptions. Which was unfortunate, given this was a disc of Thalberg. But while the Fantasy on Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots* is hardly a masterpiece, there’s no question that Mark Viner, whose first volume (10/15) dazzled Jeremy Nicholas, completely believes in it. As Viner points out in his notes – which are extensive, fascinating and very well researched – this must have been written in a tearing hurry as it appeared just six weeks after the opera’s premiere. And how much more convincing he is than Michael Ponti, who, from the opening chorale, is a man in a hurry, making little of the dramatic moments and with a far less varied colour palette than Viner.

The remaining fantasy and two *grands caprices* are all first recordings. If you’ve never encountered Halévy’s opera *Charles VI* then fret not – Thalberg’s *Grand caprice* offers a whistle-stop tour of the action, with Viner as an imaginative guide, even if he can’t always hide the foursquareness of some of the writing. The closing track, the *Grande caprice* on the March from Berlioz’s *Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale*, is given with verve and an easy virtuosity that brings great clarity to its textures. The Fantasy on Auber’s *La Muette de Portici*, on the other hand, is a more interesting proposition and Viner sets the bar high, interpretatively speaking. Though this is based on the Act 3 Tarantella, Thalberg cleverly creates a haloed *bel canto* melody simply by slowing the tempo down, and Viner duly relishes its beauty.

The remaining two pieces offer something quite different, being taken from Thalberg’s *L’art du chant appliqué au piano*, which the composer intended as a study for *cantabile* playing. Strikingly, they borrow from the opera house but Thalberg is true to the originals. ‘Casta diva’ is wonderfully unhackneyed in Viner’s hands. Victoria Power, who has recorded the complete set of 24 for Polymnia, is more studied in effect. And Viner turns ‘Bella adorata’, from Mercadante’s *Il giuramento*, into a piece of great wistfulness, his fine range of colour and dynamics turning it into a veritable tone poem (aided by the natural-sounding recording).

Viner turns 30 this year and has already proved a friend to Chaminade and Alkan, as well as an enduring champion of Thalberg. **Harriet Smith**

‘Les Huguenots’ Fantasy – selected comparison:
Ponti (VOX) CDX5047

L’art du chant appliqué au piano – selected comparison:
Power (POLY) CDP96001/99001 (oas)

‘Iberia y Francia’



Albéniz *Iberia*: Book 1; Book 3 – No 1, *El Albaicín*. *Recuerdos de viaje* – No 6, *Rumores de la caleta*. **Debussy** *Estampes* – No 2, *La soirée dans Grenade*. *L’isle joyeuse*. *Préludes*: Book 1 – No 9, *La sérénade interrompue*; Book 2 – No 3, *La puerta del vino*. **Falla** *Homenaje Mompou*. *Canción y Danza* – No 1; No 6 **Ravel** *Miroirs* – No 4, *Alborada del gracioso*. *Pavane pour une infante défunte*

Imogen Cooper *pf*

Chandos © CHAN20119 (77’ • DDD)



Imogen Cooper has been travelling and she’d like us to come along. For an artist

whose name is frequently associated with Schubert and Schumann, it is worth remembering that Cooper spent her formative years at the Paris Conservatoire and is just about as steeped in French culture as it is possible for a non-native to be. Appropriately enough, her *invitation au voyage* in this case is Ravel’s *Pavane* in a performance of insouciant simplicity, guileless and wistfully serene. Any stragglers are beckoned aboard in the morning light with an animated ‘*Alborada del gracioso*’, less hard-edged than is customary, filled with dancing, rich colours and rhetorical flair. Falla’s homage to Debussy straddles the Pyrenees, tapas whetting the appetite for dishes further south.

But first we’ll linger a while with Debussy himself, who never made more than a day trip into Spain. Debussy’s imagined Iberia, fed by the Parisian evocations of Massenet, Bizet and Charbrier and, more directly, by his friends Albéniz and Falla, stokes our anticipation. Listening to ‘*La soirée dans Grenade*’, ‘*La puerta del vino*’, ‘*La sérénade interrompue*’ and, later in the programme, *L’isle joyeuse*, it is difficult to imagine Debussy-playing more personal, suggestive or voluptuous. Cooper has lived with this music long and well. Tempting as it might be to declare these thoroughly individual interpretations the highlight of the album, Albéniz is yet to come.

When an artist seems to reign supreme in a particular repertory, as indeed Alicia de Laroccha did in Albéniz for most of my lifetime, alternative points of view can strike as pedestrian. Not here: Cooper gives us an Albéniz entirely her own, all the more vivid perhaps for its vantage from the outside looking in. Piquant, understated, with a sultry heat that smoulders rather than bursting into flame, these are compelling performances informed by the palette of Goya and undergirded with an inerrantly zesty rhythmic élan. An evening stroll through the Arab Quarter of Granada in 'El Albaicín' feels a little dangerous and very sexy. The clattering castanets and strumming guitars of 'El puerto' gradually give way to the approaching Corpus Christi procession in Seville, teeming with the faithful and a religious fervour only a few degrees from madness. In these selections from *Iberia*, as well as in 'Rumores de la caleta' from the earlier *Recuerdos de viaje*, for every secret divulged, others remain mysteries. Cooling transition on the return voyage is entrusted to the subtleties of Mompou, whose mother, we recall, was French.

For some bottom-line terrific piano-playing and programming that inflames the imagination, I suggest you set your internal default to *luxe, calme et volupté* and prepare for departure. A wonderful journey awaits.

Patrick Rucker

'Lumière & Méditerranée'

Albéniz *Iberia* - No 5, Almería; No 6, Triana
Chopin *Barcarolle*, Op 60. *Tarantelle*, Op 43
Constantinidis *Dances from the Greek Islands*
Debussy *Préludes* - Les collines d'Anacapri. *Tarantelle styrienne*
Liszt *Tarantella*, S162 No 3

Hermine Forray *pf*

Calliope © CAL1962 (58' • DDD)



The blurb on the back cover claims that the present recording comes across 'like a live recital'. Perhaps this has to do with the engineering's somewhat distant perspective, yet these words equally apply to Hermine Forray's briskly spirited, colourful and communicative renditions of Debussy's *Tarantelle styrienne* and Chopin's *Tarantelle*. She occasionally over-pedals and pushes the tempos, but it doesn't matter. However, Forray's rhythm goes all over the place in Debussy's 'Les collines d'Anacapri', while the

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...* *Mark Viner*

The adventurous pianist talks about his latest album of Thalberg's opera fantasies

Given the sheer volume of Thalberg's opera fantasies, how did you choose these particular works for your latest album?

As with the first disc of Thalberg's music I recorded, I simply went through all of these pieces and chose what I felt most drawn to. Of course, back then I had a sort of programme in mind, which was to focus mainly on works based on Italian opera. This time, I wanted the focus to be on composers of the French *grand opéra* (Auber, Halévy and Meyerbeer) who, I feel, have not only been underrepresented as composers themselves, but almost entirely neglected within the sphere of Thalberg's fantasies, paraphrases and transcriptions (three of the tracks on this album are first recordings). Aside from this, I chose works where I feel Thalberg is in full bloom, as it were, and which I feel are most representative of his style. I entertain no illusions as to the value of his music and am fully aware that it isn't up there with Alkan, Chopin or Liszt; nor do I feel that these pieces ever purported to be. Nonetheless, he is an important figure who knew how to make the piano sound ravishing and whose music, if anything, gives a vivid insight into 19th-century hedonism. This, I think, is reason enough to give him an airing.

Thalberg knew how to deck out a good tune, and does so very inventively.

Indeed - if one looks at these pieces as a whole, he used just about every device one can think of, though he seldom repeats himself. Those great swathes of arpeggios



he famously used in 1836 to clothe the prayer at the end of the *Fantasy on Rossini's 'Moïse'*, Op 33 (which is the passage most often cited as an illustration of his 'three-hand effect') aren't found in any other piece of his, though all kinds of fanciful arpeggio figurations abound elsewhere, as do myriad scalic devices, chromatic and otherwise, and interlocking octave passages, which were all novel at the time and must have engendered a certain thrill when piano virtuosity of this kind was still more or less in its infancy.

Do you plan to record any more Thalberg?

I recently acquired a beautiful first edition of the *Fantasy on Hérold's 'Zampa'*, Op 53, which was a work I'd never really looked at before, but is very exciting. I'm also increasingly drawn to the other *Fantasy on Meyerbeer's 'Les Huguenots'*, Op 43, and the *Fantasy on Rossini's 'Semiramide'*, Op 51, but nothing has been decided. There will be another instalment of the project to record Alkan's complete piano music, and I'd also like to record the Preludes of the Russian composer Felix Blumenfeld - watch this space!

Chopin *Barcarolle* lacks dynamic variety and direction.

Both *Iberia* selections fare much better and reveal Forray's innate affinity for Albéniz's texturally complex idiom. The lyrical episodes in Liszt's *Tarantella* tend to meander in Forray's hands but she conveys exciting momentum in the virtuoso dancelike episodes.

Forray's finest work occurs in Yannis Constantinidis's eight *Dances from the Greek Islands*. The third dance features independent lines that lie close to one another on the keyboard and are not so easy to untangle and differentiate,

yet Forray does so with the utmost of ease. She also balances the fourth dance's alluring tunes and gentle ostinatos in multi-dimensional perspective, and ever so slightly varies her phrasing and emphasis with each of No 6's melodic reiterations. The Constantinidis *Dances* plus the Chopin and Debussy *Tarantellas* are keepers.

Jed Distler

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Christopher Rouse

Richard Whitehouse provides rich insight into the work of the prolific US composer who has yet to make a proper breakthrough in the UK

Surprising as it seems, Christopher Rouse (b1949) has made little headway in the UK – with only the occasional performance (usually from an American artist) to remind us that in the US his music is second only to that of his contemporary John Adams in frequency of hearings. Is his an output that simply does not travel well, conveying qualities such as are innately American? Or is this more to do with an aesthetic that attracts critical opprobrium in advance of the popular acclaim that would surely be accorded his music were it more often played on this side of the Atlantic?

After private consultation with George Crumb, Rouse pursued graduate studies with composers Karel Husa and Robert Moffat Palmer. Palmer is now a largely forgotten yet once significant figure (a disc of piano pieces on New World Records is required listening) whose technically intricate while vividly communicative music certainly provided a blueprint for Rouse's own evolution. That evolution took time in coming to fruition: active as a composer from his earliest years, Rouse now acknowledges little from before his thirties. Yet two pieces for percussion group of the later 1970s have a rhythmic virtuosity and uninhibited expression key to the Dionysian impression of such works as the luridly evocative *Gorgon* (1984) or the triptych *Phantasmata* (1981-85) with their visceral yet always sophisticated and imaginative handling of the orchestra.

Rouse's Third Quartet is a combative riposte to those who equate his postmodernism with facile accessibility

Such pieces as these two from the 1980s were often appraised in terms more associated with the rock music that was current in Western music during the previous decade. Indeed, Rouse led a course on the history of rock while teaching at the Eastman School of Music. The influence of rock is at its most overt in such pieces as the percussion octet *Bonham* (1988, a tribute to the legendary Led Zeppelin drummer), but this influence can also be seen as more subtle and incremental in other works.

A change in aesthetic came during the mid-1980s, when Rouse's music took on deeper and more ambiguous emotional shadings. Many of his works over the next decade were conceived as memorials (not necessarily for family or friends) and convey an elegiac or fatalistic air more affecting for those plangent and often violent episodes that the music in question has to pass through so as to arrive at a more considered acceptance.



Not that his output from this time is always inward-looking, as the suite of Christmas carols *Karolju* (1990) – settings in several 'freely reimagined' languages with affectionate allusions to other composers – confirms. Rouse's only other major choral work, the Requiem (2002), composed to commemorate the bicentenary of Berlioz's birth while following Britten by incorporating secular texts within a Latin framework, is by far his most ambitious work and that which its composer considers his finest. More's the pity that a recording has yet to emerge.

In an output dominated by orchestral music, chamber works are relatively few, but the three string quartets are all high points. The First String Quartet (1982) is a tribute to Bartók on the centenary of his birth, and typifies the visceral impact of earlier Rouse; the Second (1988) frames its aggressive scherzo with slow movements whose stark intensity makes explicit a homage to Shostakovich; and the Third (2009), written for the Los Angeles-based Calder Quartet (who have recorded its predecessors), is a combative riposte to those who equate Rouse's postmodernism with facile accessibility.

Conversely, *concertante* works are prominent – among the standard instruments, only horn, tuba, viola, double bass and harp are unaccounted for. Add to these the sombre *Concerto per corde* (1990), the chamber concerto *Rotae Passionis* (1982) with its heady central evocation of the 14 Stations of the Cross, and the cumulative abandon of the Concerto for Orchestra (2008), and the totality becomes even more extensive. Written for Joseph Alessi, the Trombone Concerto (1991) reaffirmed Rouse as a composer uncompromising in his urge to communicate – its funereal finale an apt tribute to the recently departed Leonard Bernstein – and was duly awarded the Pulitzer Prize for music. Soon followed an incisive Violin Concerto (1991), requiring dexterity from its dedicatee Cho-Liang Lin; a Cello Concerto (1992) for Yo-Yo Ma with its death-haunted references to Monteverdi and William Schuman; then a Flute Concerto (1993) for



Carol Wincenc. The last was composed as a direct response to the killing of the British toddler James Bulger on Merseyside: the work's ethereal and incisive Celtic-infused outer movements surround an elegy in which the knowledge of a young life cruelly taken is rendered without undue emoting.

Mention could also be made of the percussion concerto *Der gerettete Alberich* (1997) for Evelyn Glennie, where said anti-hero procures himself an eventful post-*Ring* existence; the guitar concerto *Concert de Gaudí* (1999) written for Sharon Isbin with its off-the-wall take on Spanish surrealism; or the decidedly edgy and sardonic Clarinet Concerto (2000) for Larry Combs. Then there is *Seeing* (1998) – a piano concerto for Emanuel Ax in which aspects of Schumann and the eponymous song by troubled singer-songwriter Skip Spence merge into a 'meditation on madness' that feels the more powerful in its fluid continuity. A song-cycle for Dawn Upshaw, *Kabir padavali* (1998), meanwhile, might be considered a concerto for soprano in that its six settings of the 15th-century Indian poet constitute an interplay between soloist and orchestra by turns capricious and sensuous.

Central to Rouse's output are the six symphonies which have emerged over the past three decades. Written for David Zinman and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Symphony No 1 (1986) takes up the notion from the Romantic era of the 'fallen hero' over a single movement whose sustained intensity reaches a violent climax before it subsides towards a resigned close. The Second Syphony (1994) was written for Christoph Eschenbach and the Houston Symphony, its initial movement animated whereas its finale is more aggressive, the central *Adagio* an elegiac tribute to fellow composer Stephen Albert – and one of Rouse's signal achievements. These first two symphonies have been recorded by their respective

ROUSE FACTS

1949 Born in Baltimore, Maryland on February 15

1967-71 Studies at Oberlin Conservatory with Richard Hofmann

1971-73 Private studies in composition with George Crumb

1973-77 Graduate studies at Cornell University with Karel Husa and Robert Moffat Palmer

1978-81 Teaches composition at the University of Michigan

1981-2002 Teaches in the composition department at Eastman School of Music

1986 Becomes first Composer-in-Residence with Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

1993 Awarded Pulitzer Prize for music for his Trombone Concerto

1997 Joins the composition faculty of the Juilliard School

2000 Receives honorary doctorate from State University of New York at Genesco

2002 Elected to membership of the American Academy of Arts and Letters

2012-15 Composer-in-Residence with New York Philharmonic

conductors, as well as by Alan Gilbert, who has also recorded Rouse's next two symphonies.

Written for David Robertson and the St Louis Symphony Orchestra, the Third Syphony (2011) takes its cue from Prokofiev's Symphony No 2 – its seismic initial *Allegro* being followed by a theme with five variations which culminates in an implacable apotheosis. If this is Rouse's most overtly virtuosic symphony, the Fourth (2013) is his most intrinsically personal. Written for Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic, its two movements unfold from blithe contentment to what could be termed 'inward self-communing'; its enveloping blankness is left unexplained by the composer, who chose not to reveal what might lie behind this enigmatic and troubling piece.

It is to be hoped that Gilbert records Rouse's next two symphonies. The Fifth (2016), for Jaap van Zweden and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, freely plays with those formal and expressive facets of Beethoven's own Fifth; the Sixth (2019), to be premiered by Louis Langrée and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra this month, is cast in four movements for the first time, with notable use of the flugelhorn in a work whose meaning Rouse has once again chosen not to disclose.

Clearly Rouse's creativity is showing no signs of slackening. Those who are yet to encounter his music might start with one of his shorter orchestral pieces – maybe the explosive *Phaethon* (1986), the questioning *Iscariot* (1989), or *Rapture* (2000) – a work that saw in the millennium with ecstatic affirmation. It's hardly Rouse's fault if such a mood proved impossible to sustain, but the strength of his endeavour cannot be denied, and will no doubt continue in the decades ahead. **G**

In addition to the recommended listening below, it's worth investigating Marin Alsop's two discs with the Colorado SO and Concordia Orchestra, reissued on the Phoenix label and available to download; for more information, visit christopherrouse.com

LISTEN TO ROUSE AT HIS FINEST

From concertos to symphonies via a sensuous song-cycle



Der gerettete Alberich. Rapture. Violin Concerto

Cho-Liang Lin *vn* Evelyn Glennie *perc* Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra / Leif Segerstam

Ondine (6/04)

Rouse's most quixotic concerto (for violin) coupled with his most straightforward (for percussion), along with the most accessible among his orchestral pieces, in what is an excellent introduction to this composer.



Kabir padavali. Seeing

Talise Trevigne *sop* Orion Weiss *pf* Albany Symphony / David Alan Miller

Naxos

Schumann and Skip Spence are disparate yet potent influences on Rouse's piano concerto *Seeing*, here coupled with a song-cycle that represents his music at its most sensuous and inviting.



Odnazhizn. Prospero's Rooms. Symphonies Nos 3 and 4

New York Philharmonic / Alan Gilbert

Dacapo (8/16)

Two markedly contrasting symphonies juxtaposed with two equally characterful orchestral pieces testify to the success of Rouse's tenure as Composer-in-Residence with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

Vocal



Alexandra Coghlan listens to Josef Mysliveček's cantata *Adamo ed Eva*:

'Despite a healthy recording catalogue, he is best remembered today as Mozart's promiscuous friend' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



David Patrick Stearns hears the mezzo Marta Fontanals-Simmons:

'This is recommendable to anyone interested in the landscape of American art song' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 91**

Berlioz

Grande Messe des morts (Requiem), Op 5

Michael Spyres *ten* London Philharmonic Choir;

Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra / John Nelson

Erato (CD + DVD) 9029 54306-4 (82' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at St Paul's Cathedral, London,

March 8, 2019



We're immediately back on the old concert Requiem dilemma of devotion

or drama. Leading candidates on disc from the past (Munch, Beecham, the first Colin Davis, McCreesh) have tended much towards the latter – the work as an acoustic-challenging explosion of sound and space and, inevitably, a test of a recording team's ability to capture that. John Nelson, the relative newcomer in the middle of an occasional but continuous and clearly devoted new Berlioz cycle, goes (perhaps unpredictably) for the first – a Giulini rather than a Toscanini, to take a parallel from another Requiem's recorded legacy.

The result is taken from a 150th anniversary concert for the composer last March in the reverberant honeytrap of London's St Paul's Cathedral. It's a reading with especial attention paid to winds and orchestral brass, which interestingly shifts the focus of one's normal concentration to what a darkly serious – and beautiful – score the atheist Berlioz created. In this impression the carefully prepared singing of the two orchestra choirs, and the detail which Nelson and his assistants have secured from them, play the fullest part.

It also sounds to me – especially on the DVD, where you can almost see it happening – that this conductor has been outstandingly careful about the notorious acoustic. Any complaints registered about its effect in reviews of the concert are hardly apparent on these recordings of it. Are the offstage tenor (Michael Spyres, beautiful) and brass placed nearer in than

what has become customary in such a venue? It certainly looks like it; they are heard most clearly, if less operatically. The recording, in general, has lovely brass tone and is most sensitive to Nelson's wide dynamic range. The filming is neatly attentive to the linking of Nelson's (batonless) beat to the singers, with not too much touristic tracking of the building's architecture.

If you believe that a Requiem, this one especially, should be a soundtrack to the Last Judgement, you should listen elsewhere, especially to that first Colin Davis (now on Decca, 9/70). If the text above all, and the atmosphere of an event contemplated, satisfies you, there are few better options around at the moment than this latest arrival, another high point in Nelson's work for the composer.

Mike Ashman

Brahms

Ein deutsches Requiem, Op 45

Christiane Karg *sop* Matthias Goerne *bar*

Swedish Radio Choir and Symphony Orchestra /

Daniel Harding

Harmonia Mundi (CD) HMM90 2635 (71' • DDD • T/t)



On their own – rather than singing in consort with other choruses as they do on several

previous recordings – the professional members of the Swedish Radio Choir form one of the smallest ensembles on record to take on the full-orchestral version of the *German Requiem*. Unanimity of attack and suavity of tone are two obvious and immediate benefits of such a period-inclined approach, even if it hardly aligns with the choral-society forces Brahms was writing for. I find the core of the choir's sound more diffuse – and less distinctively Swedish-schooled – than in its glory days under its founder, Eric Ericson, but the sopranos still project the long, *forte* arch of 'Selig sind die Toten' like angels with celestial lungs.

And the drawbacks? Discreetly boosted in the mix for the grand summations of the second, third and sixth movements, the choir's modest size and backward placing only become noticeable in the consoling paragraphs of the outer movements, where Daniel Harding's thoughtful blend of vocal and instrumental textures risks smoothing over the articulation of Brahms's carefully chosen text, for all the shaded vowels and dotted consonants on show.

Harding's direction is unhurried, true to both the letter and the spirit of Brahms's score. His shaping of 'Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen' as an intermezzo (with burbling clarinets given a helping hand by the engineers) is especially acute, and he gives everything to the third movement's great moment of spiritual crisis, where the harrowing cries of 'Wes soll ich mich trösten?' are answered and assuaged by the dawning revelation of 'Ich hoffe an dir'. Also recorded in Stockholm, Furtwängler touched the sublime at this point, but Harding runs him close.

In building the movement's tension to that pitch of intensity, Harding enjoys the estimable advantage of Matthias Goerne as a magnificently careworn and world-weary philosopher. Between them they paint the sixth movement's vision of a new Jerusalem with hushed wonder and expectation, quite distant from the pilgrims' trudge of old. Only Christiane Karg's solo disappoints, tightly sung with a quick vibrato much better suited to the penitent Gretchen on Harding's fine recording of *Scenes from Goethe's 'Faust'* (BR-Klassik, 12/14). Overall, however, this Requiem finds its proper context not in Brahms's self-consciously assimilated heritage of Handel and Schütz but in Mozart and Schumann, not so pointedly as Rattle's *Gramophone* Award-winning recording (EMI/Warner, 5/07) but with a gravity, unspoiled by austerity, that speaks to the heart of the piece. **Peter Quantrill**



Reverberant honeytrap: John Nelson conducts the massed forces of the Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra at St Paul's Cathedral in Berlioz's Requiem

Brahms

'The Songs of Johannes Brahms, Vol 8'

49 Deutsche Volkslieder, WoO33 - Ach, englische Schäferin; Dort in den Wäldern steht ein Haus; Es ging ein Maidlein zarte; In stiller Nacht, zur ersten Wacht; Jungfräulein, soll ich mit euch gehn?; Schwesterlein, Schwesterlein; Wie komm' ich denn zur Tür herein?. Sechs Gesänge, Op 7. Sechs Gesänge, Op 6 - No 1, Spanisches Lied; No 6, Nachtigallen schwingen. Neun Gesänge, Op 69 - No 6, Vom Strande; No 7, Über die See. Agnes, Op 59 No 5. Frühlingslied, Op 85 No 5. Herbstgefühl, Op 48 No 7. Lerchengesang, Op 70 No 2. Der Schmied, Op 19 No 4. Sehnsucht, Op 14 No 8. Trennung, Op 97 No 6. Vorschneller Schwur, Op 95 No 5. Vorüber, Op 58 No 7

Harriet Burns *sop* Robin Tritschler *ten*

Graham Johnson *pf*

Hyperion © CDJ33128 (63' • DDD • T/t)



At heart, if not always in practice, a man of the people, Brahms engaged deeply with folk song throughout his life. He intended his collection of 49 *Deutsche Volkslieder* – seven of which are included here – as his creative testament. Time and again

his own songs blur the boundaries between folk song and art song, as, say, Schumann's Lieder rarely do. Listening 'blind' to this disc you'd be forgiven for thinking that 'Die Trauernde' and the doleful 'Sehnsucht' were genuine folk melodies. The reverse is true of the exquisite 'In stiller Nacht', with its gently nagging dislocation between voice and piano ('Brahms at both his most perverse and most inspired', as Graham Johnson comments in his typically rewarding note).

Like Mahler after him, Brahms was profoundly sympathetic to the sufferings of common, downtrodden humanity. One of his favourite themes, as in so many songs here, was the deserted or bereaved girl. Buoyed by Johnson's acutely judged accompaniments, the fresh-toned young soprano Harriet Burns, on her CD debut, spins a pure line and responds sensitively to the *echt*-Brahmsian moods of loneliness, regret and pathos, whether in the austere obsessive 'Anklänge' (its high line beautifully sustained) or the tender 'Agnes'. Yet while Burns's musing inwardness is often apt, I sometimes wanted stronger projection, including sharper German consonants. In the turbulent seascape 'Vom Strande' – another melding of art

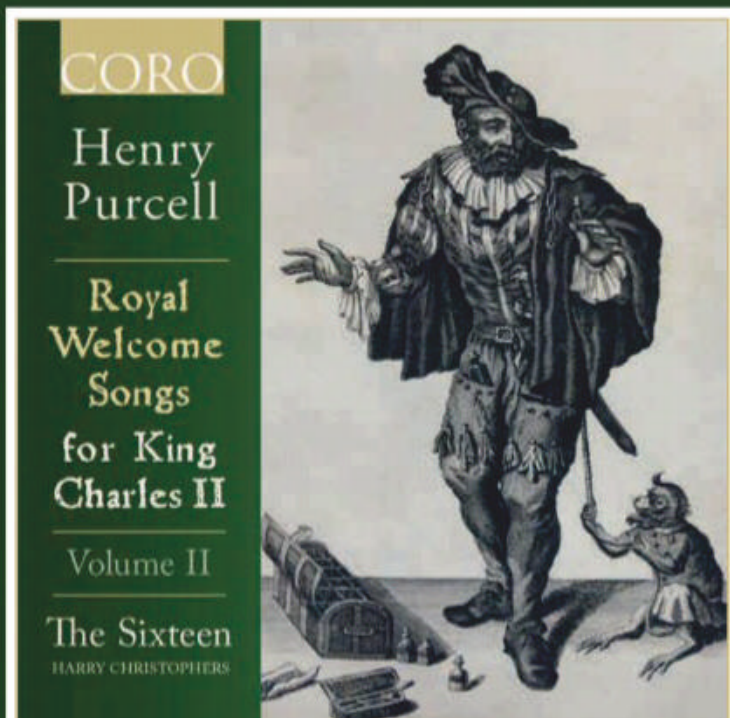
song and folk song – Burns is merely plaintive where the German soprano Juliane Banse (CPO, A/02) is passionately despairing. The text and music of 'Parole', with its echoing horn calls, at least holds out hope that the girl will be united with her huntsman lover. Burns seems dolefully resigned to a bleaker fate.

That said, singer and pianist vividly convey the gradual shift from anxiety to exultation in the tiny 'Heimkehr', and take their chances in the rare songs when the spirit lightens: say, in the teasing post-coital languor of 'Spanisches Lied', its slow bolero sway precisely caught by Johnson, or in the uninhibited rusticity of 'Der Schmied', where Burns lustily employs her full voice. In the *Deutsche Volkslieder*, several sung here as duets, she and tenor Robin Tritschler nicely balance artlessness and telling characterisation. They make the song of a dying girl 'Schwesterlein, Schwesterlein' almost unbearably poignant. Before the touching envoi of 'In stiller Nacht', the young lovers outwit protective mother in the blithe, faintly risqué duet 'Wie komm' ich denn zur Tür herein'. It's characterised with gusto and humour. And after so much loss and tragedy, humour, plus a happy ending, are just what's needed. **Richard Wigmore**

CORO



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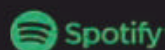
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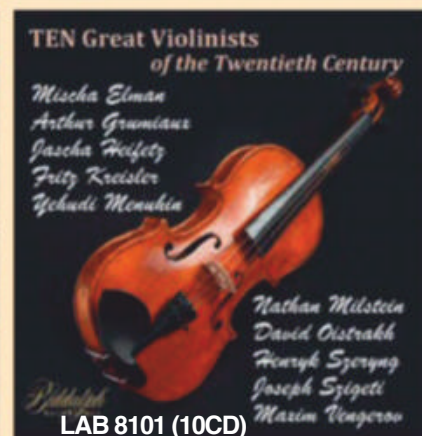


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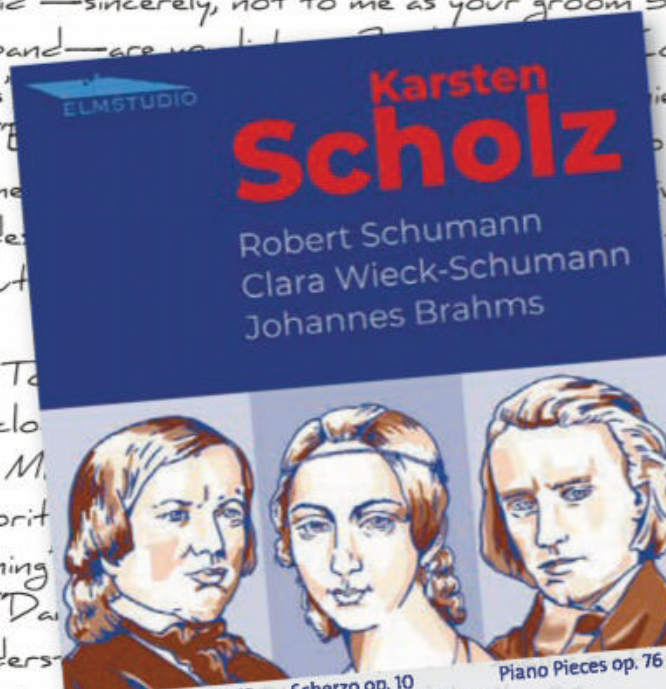
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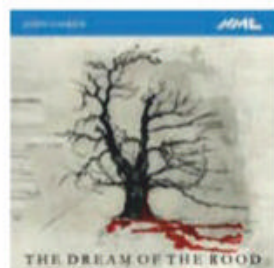
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At 3 o'clock ... Tell me how you think about the "Fantasy Pieces" and "Dances of the League of David"—sincerely, not to me as your groom but your husband—are you like ... Confusions ... by the ... long to me ... the ... etudes ... about ... 46. To ... 9 o'clock ... for M. ... favorit ... Evening ... the "Da ... I unders ... you since Fantasy Pieces op. 12 Scherzo op. 10 Three Romances op. 21 Piano Pieces op. 76 ... D. 3 ... like ... and ... to ... the "Carnaval" too much, which is the dearest of these smaller pieces that you wrote; I love it beyond all measure and romanticise while playing it ...



Casken

Anonymous Deus misertus hominis. Procurans odium. Vetus abijt littera **Casken** The Dream of the Rood **Pérotin** Viderunt omnes (arr Casken) **The Hilliard Ensemble; AskolSchönberg Ensemble / Clark Rundell**
NMC © NMCD245 (51' • DDD • T/t)



He might not enjoy the highest profile but John Casken (70 earlier this year)

has amassed a substantial and varied catalogue, from which *The Dream of the Rood* (2008) is typical in its textural density and fine-honed expressive intensity. In setting this Anglo-Saxon poem where the tree in question becomes the cross of Christ's Crucifixion, Casken has created a near-half-hour cantata whose 15 sections outline a continuous sequence of processions, interludes and motets, reaching its emotional culmination in the 'Motet of Sacrifice' – after which the mood becomes ever more inward and meditative. Throughout, the close-meshed interplay of voices and instruments is unfailingly well realised with this performance directed by Clark Rundell, one where the work's plangent sense of evocation is tangibly as well as eloquently conveyed.

In what was The Hilliard Ensemble's last recording session before disbanding, the programme also features Casken's arrangement of *Viderunt omnes*, the most elaborate of Pérotin's motets and one whose methodical intricacy is emphasised by an instrumental component redolent of those Stravinsky or Maxwell Davies might have utilised in comparable contexts. Also found here are three anonymous medieval motets setting allegorical texts, sung by The Hilliard with that searching impassiveness familiar from this ensemble over four decades of music-making.

Sound and annotations leave little to be desired, the short measure hardly an issue. That said, NMC has a fine account of Casken's oboe concerto *Apollinaire's Bird* available as download, which would be worth issuing with his Symphony and Concerto for Orchestra in due course.

Richard Whitehouse

Grandi

'Celesti fiori – Motetti'
Celesti fiori – Veniat dilectus meus. De Messa et Salmi – Nisi Dominus. Motets: Book 1 – In semita; O quam tu pulchra es; Vidi spetiosam; Book 2 – Date nomine ejus; Heu mihi; O bone Jesu;

Salvum fac; Book 4 – Factum est silentium; Plorabo; Surge prope; Book 6 – Domine ne in furore tuo. Motetti con sinfonie d'istromenti: Book 1 – Bone Jesu verbum Patris; Book 2 – Lilia **Accademia d'Arcadia; Ensemble UtFaSol / Alessandra Rossi Lürig**
Arcana © A464 (63' • DDD • T/t)



It is said that when Alessandro Grandi left Venice (where he was born and had

been trained and worked all his life) for Bergamo, tensions with the *maestro di cappella*, Monteverdi, may have been a contributory factor. Listening to this, one may imagine that Monteverdi, for all his genius, might have found the presence on his turf of such a talented young rival (and local talent, to boot) unnerving. Grandi has benefited from several anthologies all to himself, but so glorious is this music that there will always be space for more. Although several of the pieces heard here will already be familiar to devotees of this repertory (the hyper-expressive Marian lament *Plorabo*, for instance), this anthology serves as the perfect introduction, and is arguably more varied than most: Grandi's technical fluency matches his inspiration. He was equally comfortable in the smaller-scale motet and in the more elaborate Vespers setting, like the *Nisi Dominus* heard at the very end.

At any rate, Grandi gives performers more than enough to sink their teeth into, and Accademia d'Arcadia and Ensemble UtFaSol respond enthusiastically. Each piece has something different to say about its materials, whether voices are heard with or without obbligato instruments, and when the forces combine at the end the effect is truly climactic. Some issues with tuning (especially on the cantus line) notwithstanding, they make the most of the music's extroversion – truly, this is early music ... for people who think they don't like early music. **Fabrice Fitch**

Handel

'Cantate 03'

Ah, che pur troppo è vero, HWV177. Alpestre monte, HWV81. Chi rapì la pace al core, HWV90. Figlio d'alte speranze, HWV113. Non sospirar, non piangere, HWV141. Pensieri notturni di Filli, HWV134

Beatrice Palumbo *sop*
Contrasto Armonico / Marco Vitale
Ayros © AYHC03 (63' • DDD • T/t)



Contrasto Armonico's slow-burning Handel cantatas project explores often-

performed Italian *cantate con stromenti* in context alongside neglected chamber cantatas for only solo voice accompanied by basso continuo. The third instalment since Marco Vitale set up his own independent label is the seventh volume overall (the first four volumes were issued by Brilliant Classics), and it presents six different soprano cantatas written for unknown circumstances somewhere in Italy sometime between late 1706 and 1709.

Ellen Harris's perceptive essay suggests that *Alpestre monte* might have been composed in either Florence or Venice in about 1709. The inconvenient truth is that nobody really knows. Beatrice Palumbo sings with a slightly uneven flutter that nonetheless conveys an appealing emotional vulnerability and poetic sincerity, in dialogue with two violin parts shaded fluently by Enrique Gómez-Cabrero Fernández and Marzeno Biwo. Its opening accompanied recitative describing wild alpine mountains and forests mirroring an unrequited young man's despair, the first lament containing expressive chromatic dissonances and the sorrowful closing aria conveying hopelessness amid overlapping contrapuntal violins are all interpreted with expressive sensitivity.

The other cantata here to feature a violin is *Figlio d'alte speranze*. Its narration of the fluctuating fortunes of King Abdolonymus of Sidon makes it the odd one out among poetry that otherwise presents outpourings of suffering lovers. It was written on Venetian paper – but that does not necessarily mean it was composed in or for Venice. We seem to be on firmer ground with *Pensieri notturni di Filli*, probably created in Rome in 1707-08. This is a spellbinding performance albeit with occasional vocal frailties, offering blissful pastoral conversations between Palumbo and recorder player Romeo Ciuffa.

A puzzling mystery is just how much (or little) Handel composed for Florence. Harris suggests three continuo cantatas here might have Florentine origins: *Chi rapì la pace al core*, *Ah, che pur troppo è vero* and *Non sospirar, non piangere*. Again, nobody knows – but these poignant and articulately shaped performances of some of Handel's least-known works are rewarding. Palumbo's limpid singing in the intimate small-scale music is supported

elegantly by the continuo duo of cellist Marta Semkiw and Vitale, who plays the florid harpsichord obbligato part in HWV177 with judicious dexterity. The manifold qualities of these seldom-recorded continuo cantatas speak for themselves in these endearing performances. **David Vickers**

Haynes • Parry • Sterndale Bennett

'Songs & Sonnets'

Haynes Vier Lieder, Op 8 **Parry** Four Sonnets of Shakespeare (two versions) **Sterndale Bennett** Six Songs – Op 23; Op 35. Four Songs, Op 47

Belinda Williams *mez* **Mark Wilde** *ten*

David Owen Norris *pf*

EM Records © EMRCD054 (75' • DDD • T/t)



'I found I could get along better with the German than the English words',

confided Hubert Parry in a diary entry from 1874. Indeed, so thoroughly had the young composer absorbed the Germanic style that for his impressive *Four Sonnets of Shakespeare* (1873-82), he fashioned two entirely different vocal lines, one for the German translation by Friedrich Bodenstedt (1819-92) and another for Shakespeare's original text. Fascinatingly, he had even considered adding an explanatory note to the published preface: 'The German version is given because owing to certain peculiarities in the diction of these Sonnets it produces a better musical effect, without much loss to the sense.' (The piano part, by the way, is identical to both.) It certainly makes for stimulating comparative listening – and definitely whets the appetite for Parry's magnificent series of *English Lyrics* to come.

Three sets of songs – some 16 in all – by William Sterndale Bennett (his Opp 23, 35 and 47, published in 1842, 1855 and 1875 respectively) make up the lion's share of the programme. The final number from Op 23 is heard in both English ('Gentle Zephyr') and German ('Holder Zephyr wenn dein Hauch'); a great favourite of Stanford's (who refers to it in a fond centenary tribute to his supportive teacher), it's one of the highlights of a consistently pleasing and involving sequence, along with the settings of John Clare's 'Winter's gone' and Robert Burns's 'Castle Gordon' from Op 35 (featuring German translations by Carl Klingemann, who had accompanied his good friend Mendelssohn on his tour of Scotland in 1829).

Walter Battison Haynes (1859-1900) was a new name to me. Born in Kempsey near Worcester, and later a composition professor at the Royal Academy of Music, he initially studied piano and composition at the Leipzig Conservatory under Bruno Zwintscher and Carl Reinecke. Published in 1885 by the Leipzig firm Kistner, his *Vier Lieder*, Op 8, evince a melodic fecundity and superior craftsmanship that vindicate Reinecke's ringing endorsement of him as 'one of our best pupils in composition at the moment; he has been working hard and has got talent'. (I would now like to hear Haynes's *Seven Elizabethan Songs*, which, according to David Owen Norris in his perspicacious booklet essay, 'bear comparison with Roger Quilter at his best'.)

I'm happy to report that mezzo-soprano Belinda Williams and tenor Mark Wilde bring disarming freshness, agility and intelligence to this rewarding repertoire. Norris, too, lends wonderfully idiomatic support throughout, the gratifying tone of his 1887 Pleyel grand piano beautifully captured by the microphones. Handsome presentation and full texts bolster the appeal of this enterprising offering from EM Records. **Andrew Achenbach**

Honegger

Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher

Judith Chemla *spkr* **Claire de Sévigné, Christine**

Goerke *sops* **Judit Kutasi** *mez* **Jean-Noël Briend** *ten*

Steven Humes *bass* **Netherlands Children's Choir;**

Rotterdam Symphony Chorus; Royal

Concertgebouw Orchestra / Stéphane Denève

RCO Live © 1433701851 (79' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

Recorded live, September 27 & 28, 2018



Honegger's masterpiece has never been short of recordings or fully committed interpreters, and it deserves both, even if English listeners of the past have paled at the puns and the emotive excess of Paul Claudel's text, and at the necessary fervour of an actor such as Fiona Shaw in the title-role. Online you can find Judith Chemla accompanying herself in a cabaret version of Schubert's 'Ständchen', sung with a fragile, breathy, high soprano. Too cute for Joan of Arc? Some will find it so, but more than Marthe Keller (for Ozawa – DG, 4/91) or even Marion Cotillard (Alpha, 8/15) she claims our sympathy with a wide-eyed innocence that recalls the role's first recorded interpreter, Marthe Dugard (for Belgian EMI in 1943).

Honegger himself reportedly preferred a concert production, such as the booklet photos illustrate here, to a full staging. Astute disposition of forces and microphones in the Concertgebouw spreads the complex tapestry of Honegger's score before us without unravelling it or bleaching it of colour: the barking-dog ondes martenot and trio of saxophones are well caught, as is the glowering mood of the Prologue and the low satire of the card game in which Joan's life is bargained away.

Stéphane Denève's spacious pacing is to the work's advantage in many places such as the climactic dialogue, 'L'épée de Jeanne', between Joan and her confessor, Brother Dominic (Jean-Claude Druout, wonderfully wise and subdued). Greater urgency and less self-conscious polish would more vividly have evoked the gathering clamour of bells in the eighth scene, as well as bringing welcome light relief to the good-humoured clash of folk songs in the ninth.

However, the tension of the final scene at the stake builds steadily, with superb French enunciation from both Dutch choruses and polished contributions from the solo singers, especially Claire de Sévigné as Joan's guiding spirit, the Virgin. The Montpellier Opera production of 2008 (Accord, 11/09) is still gripping to watch, but for an audio-only *Jeanne d'Arc*, look no further.

Peter Quantrill

Machaut

'The Single Rose'

Bone pastor Guillaume/Bone pastor, qui pastores/Bone pastor. Certes, mon oueil. De toutes flours. De tout sui si confortee. De triste cuer/Quant vrais amans/Certes, je di. Fons totius Superbie/O Livoris feritas/Fera pessima. Je sui aussi com cils. Loyauté vueil tous jours. Merci vous pri. Quant je sui mis au retour. Qui es promesses de Fortune/Ha! Fortune, trop sui mis loing/Et non est qui adjuvat. Se d'amer me repentoie. Se je souspir parfondement. Se ma dame m'a guerpi

The Orlando Consort

Hyperion © CDA68277 (57' • DDD • T/t)



David Fallows called them a 'dream team' (11/13), Fabrice Fitch described their fourth Machaut album in this series as 'one bullseye after another' (7/17) and it will come as little surprise that now I'm about to lace them with more

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**The Orlando Consort*

Angus Smith, one of the group's tenors, discusses the appeal and relevance of the 14th-century French composer and poet Guillaume de Machaut

How would you describe Machaut's achievements as a song-composer?

Here is a composer who wrote around 150 songs, each scored for one to four performers and ranging from a running time of a minute to as much as half an hour. The hallmarks are their effortless lyricism and entrancing harmonies, both of which are full of surprising twists and turns. I am continually delighted by Machaut's seemingly inexhaustible invention and experimentation. For example, from amid beauty and order striking dissonances suddenly emerge, bizarre canons are taken to extremes, and sonic effects abound (including an early foretaste of minimalist 'pulsing' in 'Le Lay de Confort'). This may be 650-year-old music, but with its multiple layers and sophistication it is truly timeless.

There is more. The poems Machaut set were all his own work; indeed, his writing was a direct influence on Chaucer and he is widely acknowledged as one of the great poets of the Middle Ages. A strong claim could be made for Machaut to be regarded as the inventor of the song-cycle: his epic *Livre dou Voir Dit* ('Book of the True Tale') is a sequence of words and music that candidly

relates his doomed love affair with a lady some 40 years his junior. I sometimes invite people to name other great composers with an equal reputation as a lyricist; the best I can come up with is Bob Dylan.

You bring the storytelling nature of these songs vividly to life - does the poetry resonate beyond the Middle Ages?

Definitely. Our understanding of the poetry has benefited enormously from the faithful and eloquent translations from medieval French prepared for this project by R Barton Palmer. The conventions of the Courtly Love tradition abound, with characters such as Hope, Desire, Grace and Fortune making regular appearances. But as with the music, Machaut's poetic devices span the ages. Lovers of German Lieder, for example, would instantly recognise the similarity between Machaut's metaphorical reference to green in 'Se pour ce muir' as the colour of unfaithfulness and the Miller's denunciation of green as 'the hateful colour' in *Die schöne Müllerin*.



What kind of challenges have you faced in singing Machaut's songs?

Learning to trust and accept that when something unusual appears, such as an unprepared dissonance, it is intended. Once past that hurdle, music that may have seemed 'wrong' suddenly makes complete and perfect sense. Also, absorbing a medieval French pronunciation scheme without then accidentally attempting it when visiting France!

How accessible is this repertoire for modern listeners?

Very. Any 'foreignness' in the idiom very quickly disappears once the ear becomes attuned and what remains is a glorious feast of great music and sublime poetry.

compliments. I love a big recording project planned with superb scholarship, lively programming and consistent performances, and this Machaut series on Hyperion has it all.

This newest album builds around the imagery of the rose, and has a superb booklet note by Tamsyn Mahoney-Steel exploring the many connections with *Le roman de la rose*. The disc opens with the four-voice version of the famous ballade 'De toutes fleurs', previously recorded by The Orlando Consort 20 years ago (Archiv, 2/99), inviting a fascinating comparison. Whereas the earlier track prioritised both sonic beauty and a generous acoustic, this new recording displays more immediacy, in large part due to a greater focus on the texted tenor line and a softening of the 'eu' vowel in the vocalised parts. This is perhaps the most helpful summation of the present

Orlando Consort sound: they bring a gently extrovert storytelling style to Machaut.

Speaking of extrovert, I particularly like the interplay of tenors in the three-voice motet 'Bone pastor Guillerme/Bone pastor, qui pastores/Bone pastor'. It is unusual to have all three voices starting with the same words but The Orlando Consort again avoid taking this as a cue to smooth performance: keeping the tempo brisk and the words crisp, they make the most of the harmonic throb where Guillerme's head is adorned with a mitre. Again, the results are arresting and immediate, particularly when compared to the smoother, ethereal approach of, say, Musica Nova (Aeon, A/11). Having said that, there are also moments of great intimacy, such as the *rondeau* 'Merci vous pri', an exercise in delicately imploring a lady of high birth.

Edward Breen

Mysliveček

Adamo ed Eva

Roberta Mameli, Alice Rossi *sops*

Luciana Mancini *mez* Valerio Contaldo *ten*

Il Gardellino / Peter Van Heyghen

Passacaille Ⓢ Ⓜ PAS1053 (129' • DDD • T/t)



An almost exact contemporary of Haydn, the Czech composer Josef

Mysliveček was a significant figure in the development of the Classical style. But despite a healthy recording catalogue, he is best remembered today as Mozart's promiscuous friend (mentioned frequently in the composer's letters), who would eventually lose his nose to syphilis. Can this new account of Mysliveček's 1771 oratorio do anything



Outstanding communicator: tenor Kyle Stegall is accompanied by Eric Zivian, playing an 1841 Rauch fortepiano, in songs by Robert and Clara Schumann

to shift this unfortunate focus back on to the music?

Yes and no. Period band Il Gardellino are bright and pungent under director Peter Van Heyghen. Bassoons grunt and chuckle with plenty of husky character, and two trumpets and a horn add brilliance and stature. Strings are crisp and businesslike, propelling us into the action in a breathless, larky and unashamedly operatic overture. The pace slows a bit with the arrival of the voices. The oratorio opens in the immediate aftermath of the Fall, exploring the emotional reactions of a sulky Adam (not above throwing blame Eve's way) and a more abashed Eve. Two angels – of Mercy and Justice – serve as guides, judges and interrogators.

Giovanni Granelli's libretto is hard going, interested more in theological nitty-gritty than emotion, but the music has little patience with such academic sobriety, ignoring it in a sequence of attractive, often virtuoso arias. If Mysliveček lacks the emotional range of his younger friend Mozart, he makes up for it with plenty of colour and easy melodies.

The voices here almost all share a slightly pushed quality, which lends a

little strain to music that demands the generous spin and tonal breadth of opera rather than more contained, baroque delivery. Tenor Valerio Contaldo makes a swaggering Adam but tends to bleat at moments of highest intensity. Luciana Mancini is balm to his fire – a lovely, smooth mezzo, albeit sometimes a little stern of tone. Roberta Mameli's Angel of Justice is more expressively extrovert and occasionally runs a little wild in coloratura but Alice Rossi's Angel of Mercy is supple and silky – a softening influence in the lovely duet 'Non e crudel rigore' with Mameli.

An attractive work, if *Adamo ed Eva* doesn't quite banish memories of Mysliveček's more secular pursuits, it adds a welcome new spiritual dimension to man and musician. **Alexandra Coghlan**

C Schumann • R Schumann

'Myrtle & Rose'

C Schumann Ich stand in dunklen Träumen, Op 13 No 1. Liebst du um Schönheit. Lorelei. Mein Stern. O Lust, o Lust, Op 23 No 6

R Schumann Liederkreis - Op 24; Op 39

Kyle Stegall *ten* **Eric Zivian** *fp*

Avie © AV2407 (60' • DDD • T/t)



To hear songs by Schumann – either Schumann – with a fortepiano is perhaps a rarer occurrence than one would expect. I mean no disrespect to Kyle Stegall when I say that one of the great pleasures of this album is to hear Eric Zivian put his 1841 Rauch through its paces in Robert's two *Liederkreise* and a handful of Clara's finest songs.

Zivian's sensitive playing relishes the instrument's possibilities and distinctive colour – it has a more immediately distinctive timbre, for example, than the 1837 Érard used by Kristian Bezuidenhout in his recording of Op 24 with Mark Padmore. There's a lovely tangy quality to its lower range in particular, and the clang and clatter we get in 'Schöne Fremde', 'Frühlingsnacht' and 'O Lust, o Lust' take us bracingly out of the sonic comfort zone of a modern grand.

The flipside, perhaps, is its inability to sustain the long lines of 'Mondnacht', but in that song we have a good demonstration



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Perfectly blended and balanced: Christopher Gray directs the girl choristers of Truro Cathedral in music by Dobrinka Tabakova

of the virtues of Stegall's moving, sensitive approach. The voice is youthful, if more lightly acidic than the sweet-toned Padmore, and cleanly produced, with a middle and lower register that is occasionally reminiscent, it struck me, of Ian Bostridge. And he's a similarly outstanding communicator – a passionate and engaged one, too, as is evinced by the fact that he furnishes the booklet with his own direct and lucid translations.

There is nothing in the performances that isn't done with care and intelligence, and the pair strike me as especially persuasive in the carefully chosen Clara Schumann songs. 'Lorelei' builds up the tension excitingly, 'Mein Stern' is tender and lyrical, 'Liebst du um Schönheit' gently wistful. With fresh, engaging accounts of Robert's two cycles, too, as well as impeccable engineering, there's a great deal to enjoy in this release.

Hugo Shirley

Liederkreis, Op 24 – selected comparison:

Padmore, Bezuidenbuit (12/10) (HARM) HMU90 7521

Tabakova

Alma redemptoris mater^a. *Diptych*^b. *Jubilate Deo*^c. *Kynance Cove*^d. *Of a rose sing we*^e. *On the South Downs*^e. *Praise*^c. *Truro Canticles*^c
acde **Truro Cathedral Choir; dBBC Concert Orchestra / Christopher Gray** with
^e**Natalie Clein** vc ^{bce}**Joseph Wicks** org
Regent © REGCD530 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Released in conjunction with BBC Radio 3, this generously filled disc presents a broad and attractive showcase of works by Bulgarian-born Dobrinka Tabakova (b1980), the current composer-in-residence with the BBC Concert Orchestra.

An *a cappella* Marian antiphon, *Alma redemptoris mater* (2014), makes a gentle opening, bathing the listener with a sense of wonderment and increasing fervour. A sense of height and space also imbues the upper-voices setting of the *Jubilate Deo* (2003). Those expecting something exuberant here might be surprised by its calm, shimmering unhurriedness. The 20 girl choristers are perfectly blended and balanced.

They also excel in the *Truro Canticles* (2017) which, with the carol *Of a rose sing we* (2016) and the choral/orchestral *Kynance Cove* (2018), are just some of the fruits of Tabakova's two-year residency with Truro Cathedral's musicians. This must be one of the slowest and most intense *Magnificats* yet written. Shades of Duruflé's 'In Paradisum' float atmospherically, mingling with some of the hypnotic, homophonic Mass of

Tavener. The *Nunc dimittis* is especially luscious. Joseph Wicks makes a good case for the *Diptych* for organ; Father Willis's sparkling flutes come to the fore in the 'Pastoral Prelude'.

After so much slow and ruminative music it is good to reach the more turbulent and shifting colours of *Kynance Cove*, a setting of John Harris's poem. Here, soaring soprano and tenor lines shoot high into the neo-Gothic arches of John Loughborough Pearson's masterpiece. The blazing added-sixth ending is stunning.

Natalie Clein joins the BBC Concert Orchestra, both boys' and girls' cathedral choirs and four local youth choirs for the three-movement *On the South Downs* (2009; text by William Bourdillon). This is in a slightly softer focus, with the added 'character' of the solo cello providing further interest. This live performance makes a radiant conclusion to a deeply impressive disc expertly steered by Christopher Gray. Bravo Truro!

Malcolm Riley

Vasks

Laudate Dominum. Lūgšana Latvījai (Prayer for Latvia). Lūgšana mātei (Prayer for a Mother). Missa

Laura Teivāne sop **State Choir Latvija; Latvian National Symphony Orchestra; Riga Professional Symphonic Band / Māris Sirmāis**
Skani © LMIC/SKANI070 (58' • DDD • T/t)

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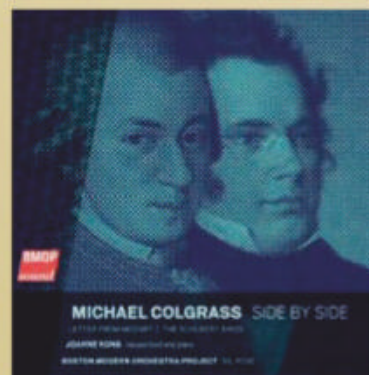
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Hugely ambitious: Marta Fontanals-Simmons brings a depth of tone to a programme of women's voices in American song



Prayer for a Mother (1978) is the earliest work by Vasks on this disc and

provides not only an arresting opening but perhaps a benchmark for the other works recorded here. It has the same restless energy, in search of peace, as the Górecki of that time, but also something that one might describe as Mahlerian, and the text by Imants Ziedonis gives the composer everything he could want in terms of emotional response. Laure Teivāne is the ideal soloist, her voice lacking neither subtlety nor power.

I do not find the same qualities in *Laudate Dominum* (2016), which sounds instead like a bombastic neo-Baroque/modal orchestral celebration intercalated with endless choral meanderings of more penitential tone. And the neo-Baroque/neoclassical quality is also very much present in the *Missa* (2005), whose moments of brilliance, such as the orchestral opening to the *Sanctus*, are so often subsumed in a formulaic reimagination of the Rococo. It is not a work that evidences huge structural

integrity, in spite of the magnificent performance it receives here. The final *Prayer for Latvia*, to a poem by Velta Toma, is of the moving-bombastic style: one cannot help being moved by the sentiments but simultaneously astonished by the military-march quality of the music.

Knowing other, highly impressive music by Vasks as I do, I cannot help but find this disc disappointing, though certainly valuable for its excellent version of the *Prayer for a Mother*. **Ivan Moody**

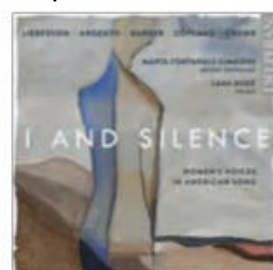
'I and Silence'

'Women's Voices in American Song'

Argento From the Diary of Virginia Woolf

Barber Nocturne, Op 13 No 4 **Copland** Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson - No 3, Why do they shut me out of Heaven?; No 4, The world feels dusty; No 9, I felt a funeral in my brain **Crumb** Three Early Songs - No 2, Let it be forgotten **Lieberson** Rilke Songs

Marta Fontanals-Simmons *mez* **Lana Bode** *pf*
Delphian © DCD34229 (60' • DDD • T)



Subtitled 'Women's Voices in American Song', Marta Fontanals-Simmons's

hugely ambitious debut solo album takes a broad approach to its own concept: no female composers here, mostly (but not all) female poets and a frequent (though not consistent) ear for the female condition. Yet the programme has its own kind of rigour, requiring a high level of cognitive comprehension to illuminate Peter Lieberson's 2001 *Rilke Songs* and to maintain the narrative of Dominick Argento's 1974 *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, the two main works on the disc.

The most prevalent theme here is journeys from one's inner darkness into light – expressed in some brilliant sequencing, starting with the bookends on each side of the Virginia Woolf diaries. At the front end, Copland's three Emily Dickinson settings end with 'I felt a funeral in my brain' that leads into Woolf's journey towards suicide. Woolf's 'Last Entry (March 1941)' is followed by Barber's 'Nocturne' from Four Songs, also written in 1941 and beginning with the line 'Close my darling both your eyes' (Frederic Prokosch) built over a series of soothing arpeggios. Similarly, Lieberson's final Rilke song, about the mystical beauty of life cycles as embodied by flowers, is followed by George Crumb's setting of Sara Teasdale's verse with similar flower

imagery – this is very early Crumb, sounding a bit like Fauré – with the consoling words ‘Time is a kind friend’. Such poetic juxtapositions make this disc recommendable to anyone interested in the landscape of American art song. Beyond that, the challenges of performing the repertoire are steep.

Both Argento and Lieberson embrace their texts selflessly and scrupulously – in their own ways. The Woolf texts are invitingly unfiltered but are also private, not meant for an audience and having details that can seem inconsequential. Argento zeroes in on the inner agitation, reflects much of the visual imagery in the piano-writing and, at times, fashions intentionally meandering vocal lines that seem to be made up as they go along. With five selected poems from Rilke’s *Sonnets of Orpheus*, Lieberson deals with something more dense and organised with less visual imagery, and verses that often address an unseen world, occasionally with imagery drawn from ancient mythology. Lieberson always aimed high as a composer; and if these *Rilke Songs* are often musically oblique, it’s because the composer wasn’t externalising the meaning of the sonnets as much as he was entering into them.

The music is deeply examined by Fontanals-Simmons and pianist Lana Bode, so much so that the mezzo-soprano contributes her own highly comprehending English translations of the Rilke sonnets in the CD booklet. Yet in both pieces, one doesn’t always hear a wealth of insights. In contrast to Brian Mulligan’s volatile approach to Argento’s settings of the Woolf diaries (Naxos, 10/17^{US}), this new disc tries to establish an overall tone to the eight songs, which is tough in a piece that encompasses such contrasting states of mind, by tempering emotional extremes. Fontanals-Simmons has great depth of vocal tone that she successfully scales down for Woolf’s more introspective moments, and is particularly effective in ‘Last Entry (March 1941)’ at conveying a sense of Woolf battling horrific shadows that were known only to her. Yet she underplays some significant rhetorical moments, particularly in comparison to Linn Maxwell (Centaur, 1992), a Bach specialist who brings interpretative precision to every phrase. In the Lieberson songs, Fontanals-Simmons seems a bit polite and generalised next to Lorraine Hunt Lieberson (Bridge, 10/09), who brought a charismatic pathos to everything she sang, whether or not you fathomed Rilke’s verse. Yet where else will you find this music in one, well-planned disc? **David Patrick Stearns**

‘Kaiser Maximilian I’

Anonymous Tanzbüchlein der Margarete von Österreich – excs **Fevin/Mouton** O pulcherrima mulierum **Hofhaimer/Neusidler** Ach lieb mit laid **Isaac** Kein frewd hab ich uff erd. Mein Freud allein in aller Welt. Zwischen Berg und tieffe Tal **Josquin** Proch dolor/Pie Jesu **Ockeghem** D’ung aultre amer **Senfl** Kain höhers lebt noch schwebt. Kein Freud’ ohn’ dich **Willaert** Kein Adler in der Welt so schön

Per-Sonat / Sabine Lutzenberger

Christophorus © CHR77438 (63’ • DDD • T)



In a year packed with major anniversaries – Leonardo, Queen

Victoria, Gandhi, Napoleon – it may have slipped your attention that 2019 also marks 500 years since the death of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. A generous and knowledgeable patron of the arts, Maximilian’s Hofkapelle was a hub for some of the age’s greatest sacred musicians. But it’s the court’s secular repertoire – what the theorist Tinctoris termed the *cantus parvus* (‘small songs’) – that is the focus here, in this delightful anniversary tribute.

Ensemble Per-Sonat and their director Sabine Lutzenberger have put together a varied recital of musical miniatures that combines dances, love songs and secular chansons to give a vivid picture of the daily life of Maximilian’s court, where music might be after-dinner entertainment, seduction tool or accompaniment to dancing. Ockeghem’s hugely popular love song ‘D’ung aultre amer’ is heard first in its elegant, mercurial original, then in one of many anonymous arrangements – crisper and more playful than Lutzenberger’s own yearning solo account.

What emerges most strongly here is the sense of music on a cusp. Many of the modal dances, with their primitive two- or three-part counterpoint, look back to earlier decades, while in the sophisticated works by Heinrich Isaac and Ludwig Senfl (whose exquisite love songs, particularly the former’s ‘Kein frewd hab ich uff erd’ and the latter’s ‘Kein Freud’ ohn’ dich’, are a highlight) anticipate the musical future.

Touchingly, the programme closes with the brooding, sober beauty of Josquin’s ‘Proch dolor/Pie Jesu’, whose text mourns the death of an emperor – probably Maximilian himself. Two texts and three voices are tightly woven into a canonic path from which there is no deviating – a metaphor that needs no explanation.

The joy of this release is in the detail: the close recording that brings out the grit and

gasp of the period strings, their rich colours illuminated against the white purity of the voices, the many stories of unlikely or curious provenance that emerge in the booklet notes. Only the omission of song translations blots this otherwise impeccable disc. **Alexandra Coghlan**

‘The Last Rose of Summer’

‘Folksongs from the British Isles’

The Queen’s Six

Signum © SIGCD598 (73’ • DDD • T)



The King’s Singers cast a long shadow, and it looms particularly dark

over this latest release by The Queen’s Six. When you’re an all-male *a cappella* choral sextet from England the comparisons are inevitable, unavoidable. But it’s hard not to feel with this recording of folk songs from the British Isles that the group have gone out of their way to court comparison.

It’s not one that works in The Queen’s Six’s favour. What we lack here in six of Windsor’s 12 lay-clerks is the sheer vocal quality (tenors aside) needed to carry this repertoire. The charm of so many of these classic folk ballads – ‘Annie Laurie’, ‘O waly waly’, ‘My love is like a red, red rose’ – is their simplicity. If you can’t play it absolutely straight, trusting in your legato line and beauty of tone to do the work, then you may as well forget it. It’s not like these classic songs (it would have been lovely to see just one or two outliers included along with the obvious) really need another account, especially when there are already several better on this label alone.

And then there are the arrangements. Some serious talent is represented here – Timothy Byram-Wigfield, Alexander L’Estrange alongside Vaughan Williams and Holst – but most of the modern arrangements just can’t seem to leave well alone. The fiddly fussiness and knee-jerk interventionism of many (‘Dance to your daddy’, ‘Dashing away with the smoothing iron’, ‘Down by the Salley Gardens’) just feels glib, smothering the original melodies in pillows of added-note harmonies.

It’s an approach that works best for the lighter numbers. Ruairi Bowen’s ingenious, Brittenish ‘What shall we do with the drunken sailor?’ works well; and if Stephen Carlestone’s ‘Bobby Shaftoe’ isn’t delivered with quite the panache that The King’s Singers bring to Gordon Langford’s, then that’s no fault of this deft arrangement.



The ensemble Marguerite Louise and Gaétan Jarry perform an imagined Mass for the Sun King

Overall, though, it's hard to find any especially compelling reason beyond Dr Andrew Plant's excellent booklet essay to add this recording to a collection.

Alexandra Coghlan

'Messe du Roi Soleil'

Anonymous Communion de la Messe pour Saint Louis **F Couperin** Messe à l'usages des Couvents. Venite exultemus Domino **Guilain** Suite du troisième ton **Lalande** Exaltabo te Domine, S66 **Lully** Exaudiat te Dominus **Philidor** Marche pour fifres et tambours **Marguerite Louise / Gaétan Jarry** org
Château de Versailles Spectacles © CVS008
(53' • DDD • T/t)



This is an imaginary confection of a Mass for the Sun King. Music within worship at the court of Louis XIV happened on different sorts of Sundays and other occasions at various chapels in numerous palaces, and ranged in scale

and genre from simple to elaborate. Rather than reconstructing a single event, this is a mixture of the diverse sorts of music heard during both 'low' ordinary Sunday Masses and on about 10 'great' feast days of the year.

Recorded in the spectacular royal chapel at Versailles inaugurated only five years before Louis XIV's death, proceedings commence with the chapel bell tolling, and the arrival of the king in his gallery is announced by a little march for fifes and side-drums by André Danican Philidor (court woodwind player, percussionist and royal music librarian). A short piece by Jean Adam Guilain is played on the large organ painstakingly rebuilt in the 1990s after centuries of butchery. Next is Lalande's *grand motet Exaltabo te, Domine*, a setting of Psalm 30 composed for the royal chapel in 1704 but reworked in 1720; this enchanting performance by the ensemble Marguerite Louise is typified by the consecutive triptych of movements incorporating weightless high voice soloists accompanied by recorders ('Ego

autem dixi in abundantia'), broodingly atmospheric low bass instruments in a slow solo for tenor ('Avertisti faciem tuam') and a suspension-laden penitential chorus ('Ad te Domine clamabo').

During the Offertory, two short pieces from Couperin's collection of two organ Masses (published 1690) are played either side of his *petit motet Venite exultemus Domino* – accompanied only by continuo, some of its two soprano solo parts are sung by the entire female voices of the choir (allegedly evoking the practice of the nuns at Saint Cyr). After a plainchant antiphon for communion on the feast of St Louis, the finale is Lully's *grand motet Exaudiat te Dominus* (1687), a setting of Psalm 20 performed with panache. Gaétan Jarry plays the organ solos piquantly, and directs with sensitivity for nuanced phrasing and textures.

David Vickers

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WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **Paul Kilbey**'s point of departure is ...

Schoenberg's Pierrot lunaire (1912)

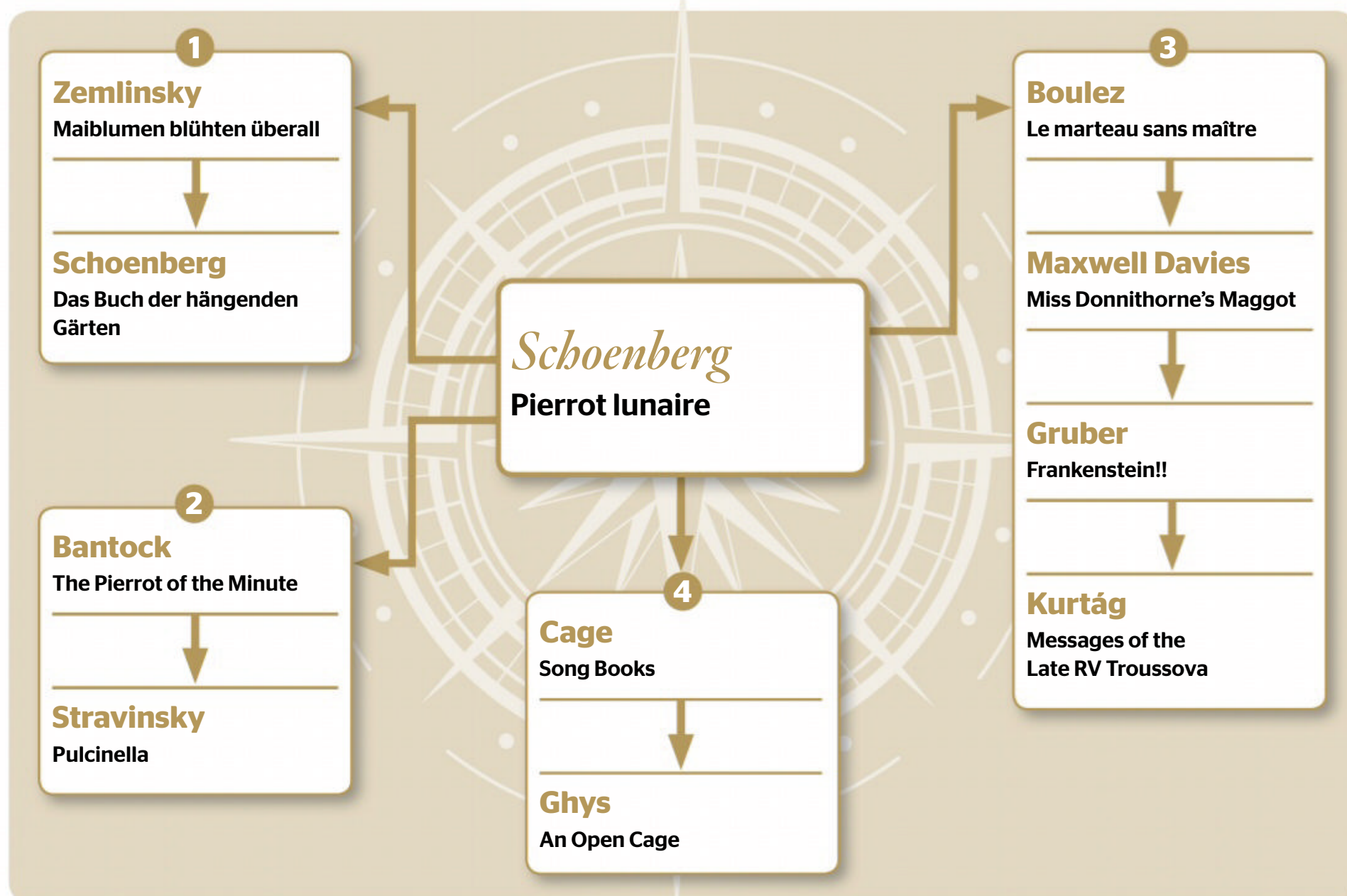
A 'free atonal' work, *Pierrot lunaire* is tethered neither to tonality nor to Schoenberg's later serial system. Instead, it floats in some strange, gravity-free realm. Even Stravinsky was captivated. But *Pierrot* was also groundbreaking in many more ways. Its minutely, mathematically detailed structure of 'three times seven poems' was hugely influential, and so was its ensemble of voice with piccolo/flute, clarinet/bass clarinet, violin/viola, cello and piano – 'Pierrot ensembles' are now widespread. The vocal part is the canonic example of *Sprechstimme*, that curious combination of speech and song. On this Pierre Boulez recording, Yvonne Minton strays controversially closer to the singing end of the spectrum. Notoriety aside, it's thrilling.

● Yvonne Minton *mez* Michel Debost *picc/fl* Antony Pay *cl*
Pinchas Zukerman *vn/va* Lyn Harrell *vc* Daniel Barenboim *pf*
Pierre Boulez *cond* (Sony Classical, 2/79)

1 *Late Romantic origins*

Zemlinsky *Maiblumen blühten überall* (c1903) Zemlinsky was Schoenberg's only regular teacher, but the influence went both ways. *Maiblumen blühten überall* was written in response to Schoenberg's early string sextet *Verklärte Nacht* (1899), for it was likewise both written for string sextet and based on a Richard Dehmel poem. But unlike Schoenberg, Zemlinsky sets the poem itself, for soprano. This and other turn-of-the-century vocal works by Zemlinsky, all included in James Conlon's collection, vividly exemplify the declamatory, post-Wagnerian vocal style that Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* so crisply cut through.

● Soile Isokoski *sop* Cologne Gürzenich Orchestra / James Conlon (Warner Classics, 11/00)



Schoenberg Das Buch der hängenden Gärten (1909) In its 1979 *Gramophone* review, the Boulez/Minton *Pierrot lunaire* was said to interpret the work ‘as marking a late stage in the history of the romantic song-cycle’. Quite. From a few years earlier, Schoenberg’s song-cycle *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* sets a doomed love story by poet Stefan George, and although it’s atonal like *Pierrot*, its glistening and playful harmonic language makes it particularly clear how much Schoenberg took from Romanticism.

● Phyllis Bryn-Julson *sop* Ursula Oppens *pf* (Music & Arts, 6/92)

2 Comedic cousins

Bantock The Pierrot of the Minute (1908) The ancient Italian theatre tradition of the *commedia dell’arte* had a peculiar second coming in the early 20th century. Granville Bantock’s lively comedy overture is one of many works inspired by its stock character Pierrot, the sad, lovesick clown. This programmatic piece, hugely popular in its day, is a lustful fantasy in the manner of *L’après-midi d’un faune*: Pierrot falls asleep and imagines an encounter with a seductive ‘Moon-maiden’.

● BBC Scottish SO / Norman Del Mar (Lyrita, 8/16)

Stravinsky Pulcinella (1920) Stravinsky was struck by *Pierrot lunaire*: ‘the solar plexus as well as the mind of early 20th-century music’, he called it, though only after Schoenberg had died. Stravinsky’s own *commedia dell’arte*-inspired works, the ballets *Petrushka* (1911) and *Pulcinella*, were quite different. The latter, a breezy arrangement of some obscure early 18th-century music, shows the remarkable range of the *commedia dell’arte*’s influence on modernism. The purely instrumental *Pulcinella Suite* (1922) is played more often, but it’s worth hearing the complete ballet, with its several vocal numbers.

● Teresa Berganza *mez* Ryland Davies *ten* John Shirley-Quirk *bar* London Symphony Orchestra / Claudio Abbado (DG, 6/79)

3 Direct descendants

Boulez Le marteau sans maître (1955) Conceptually, Boulez’s post-war masterpiece is a near psychotic intensification of *Pierrot lunaire*. An unusual ensemble of six instrumentalists performs nine movements together with a contralto tasked with both conventional singing and *Sprechstimme*. Just like Schoenberg’s, the score combines fierce intellectual rigour with unpredictability and subtlety. Most importantly, Boulez’s work inhabits a similarly other-worldly sonic universe.

● Hilary Summers *contr* Ensemble Intercontemporain / Pierre Boulez (DG, 5/05)

Maxwell Davies Miss Donnithorne’s Maggot (1974) It is no coincidence that Mary Thomas, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies’s muse for *Miss Donnithorne’s Maggot*, also sang a mean *Pierrot lunaire* – nor that this work was written for its composer’s



Pierrot lunaire: where will Schoenberg’s melodrama take us next?

own Pierrot ensemble (plus percussion), the *Fires of London*. This ‘sequel’ to the iconoclastic *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969) may boast an eclectic musical language a world away from Schoenberg’s, but its wildness and emotional extremes recall *Pierrot*’s most intense moments.

● Mary Thomas *mez* *Fires of London* / Peter Maxwell Davies (Unicorn, 3/88)

Gruber Frankenstein!! (1977) The characters that populate Gruber’s much-loved, grotesquely comic ‘pan-demonium’, from Frankenstein himself (and his dance partner, ‘the test-tube lady’) to an eye-gouging mouse, are distant relatives of Pierrot who are perhaps more fun at parties. Gruber’s own chansonier style of vocal delivery may be unclassifiable, but it’s also unthinkable without Schoenberg’s cabaret-inspired *Pierrot lunaire* as precursor.

● BBC Philharmonic / HK Gruber *voc* (Chandos, 5/07)

Kurtág Messages of the Late RV Troussova (1980) Alongside everything else, *Pierrot lunaire* is a masterclass in aphorism. Today’s leading musical aphorist is György Kurtág, whose fondness for miniature forms has often resulted in creations recalling both *Pierrot* and Schoenberg’s pupil Webern. *Kafka Fragments* (1987) for soprano and violin is better known, but *Messages of the Late RV Troussova* was his breakthrough work in the West in 1981. These 21 songs for soprano and ensemble have tremendous emotional resonance.

● Natalia Zagorinskaja *sop* Askol Schönberg / Reinbert de Leeuw (ECM New Series, 8/17)

4 ‘Another way’

Cage Song Books (1970) ‘His whole life is based on the teachings of Schoenberg, gone another way,’ said the composer Morton Feldman of his friend John Cage. Differing styles aside, the American iconoclast’s several years studying with Schoenberg left their mark. *Song Books* presents a dizzyingly eclectic range of scores, both notated and text-based, which produce an ever-changing, gleeful paean to the unexpected. Performer Reinhold Friedl, incidentally, has also recorded a shortened, parody version of *Pierrot lunaire*.

● Reinhold Friedl (Karlrecords)

Ghys An Open Cage (2012) Cage often reminisced about his time in Schoenberg’s composition class, as he does briefly in the audio recording that underpins Florent Ghys’s *An Open Cage*. The chamber ensemble players tease out the inherent musicality of Cage’s speaking voice in an engrossing tribute to the blurriness of the line between speech and song.

● Bang on a Can All-Stars (Cantaloupe)

Available to stream at Apple Music

Opera



Peter Quantrill gets to grips with a provocative opera by Wolfgang Rihm:

'Jakob Lenz is a young man's opera, no less the work of a disturbingly ingenious mind than Adès's Powder Her Face' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 100**



Mike Ashman watches Wagner's Lohengrin from Bayreuth:

'Beczala fits the title-role like a glove, with the Italianate sound that one may dream of and more than enough stamina' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 102**

Bartók

Duke Bluebeard's Castle

John Relyea *bass*..... Bluebeard

Michelle DeYoung *mez*..... Judith

Pál Mácsai *spkr*..... Prologue

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Edward Gardner

Chandos © CHSA5237 (59' • DDD/DSD)

Includes libretto and translation



Both John Relyea and Michelle DeYoung have recorded these roles before – both,

as it happens, with Esa-Pekka Salonen conducting. I missed the DVD from the Paris Opéra featuring Relyea (ArtHaus, 8/18) but now I'm impatient to see it, for his Bluebeard on this Chandos disc is a force of nature as well as a deeply sympathetic figure, and sonorously sung. In some interpretations of Bartók's opera, Judith is the dramatic focus, but not here. And that's not to knock DeYoung, whose voice has thickened slightly since her superb live recording with the Philharmonia (Signum, 7/14), but who still possesses a formidable blend of heft and tonal beauty. She gives us a marvellously multifaceted Judith: ardent in her promises to lift the castle's gloom, persuasive in her sincerity as she begs for the doors to be opened, and seductive when she comes to the final door and needs difficult answers.

I only wish Edward Gardner's conducting was as characterful as the singing. Often, the sound he elicits feels more rooted in the 19th century than the 20th. This works fine in the opera's early sections, and brings an unexpected yet intriguing domestic naturalness to the couple's interactions. But heard alongside Salonen's Philharmonia account, or Kertész's classic recording (Decca, 5/66, 4/95), Bartók's fantastically lurid orchestral colour palette seems muted and the score's sharp rhythms smoothed over. Listen, say, after the opening of the fourth door (track 11), where the Bergen

Philharmonic's genteel playing suggests a lovely manicured garden; there's nothing at all macabre about it.

Gardner does come through in some big moments. I'm pleased that he doesn't pull the tempo back as the fifth door is unlocked, for instance, so we sense Bluebeard's surging pride as he reveals his vast domain. And the appropriately harsh glare of the brass in this scene provides stark contrast with the ghostly bleakness of the next and its lake of tears.

But with the final revelation, as Relyea rapturously projects Bluebeard's terrible sorrow, Gardner and the Bergen Philharmonic fail to provide a corresponding level of intensity. This is a pity, as Relyea's Bluebeard is among the most moving – and human – on disc. I dare say he's the equal of Miklós Székely, who studied the role with the composer (Hungaraton, 5/79). Relyea is so impressive, in fact, that I'd urge anyone who loves this work to hear this recording, despite its flaws. And there are bonuses: Pál Mácsai makes music of the prologue's spoken verses, and Paul Griffiths's booklet note is exceptionally perceptive.

Andrew Farach-Colton

J Gibson

Violet Fire – An Opera About Nicola Tesla

Scott Murphree *ten*..... Tesla

Marie Mascari *sop*..... White Dove

Solange Merdinian *contr*..... Katherine Johnson

Greg Purnhagen *bar*..... Reporter

Katie Geissinger *mez*..... Margaret Storm

Peter Stewart *bass*..... Mark Twain

chorus and ensemble / Mick Rossi

Orange Mountain © 2 OMM7018 (80' • DDD)

Includes synopsis and libretto



His name may not be the first to spring to mind when discussing American

minimalist music, but Jon Gibson has played an influential role in the development of the form both as

performer and composer. During the late 1960s and early '70s he worked alongside all four of its main proponents, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Philip Glass – the only musician to do so – and has remained an integral member of Philip Glass's ensemble since its formation in 1968. Both Reich and Glass wrote important early pieces with Gibson's virtuoso soprano saxophone-playing in mind.

While all this was going on, Gibson also produced several important pieces that explored both the repetitive, pulse-based minimalism of Reich and the drone-like sounds of Young. *Thirties* (1970), for mixed instrumentation, remains an early minimalist classic. Yet Gibson's music has gone under the radar, which is also – quite literally – the case with the pioneering scientist and engineer Nikola Tesla, the subject of Gibson's 2006 one-act opera *Violet Fire*.

Born in present-day Croatia in 1856, Tesla's groundbreaking experimentation involving electricity, wireless communication and X-ray imaging was largely eclipsed by the achievements of others working in the area, such as Edison and Marconi. Tesla's ambitious plans to build the first long-distance transmission tower in Wardenclyffe, Long Island, in 1917 eventually floundered due to lack of funding. The scientist died in relative poverty and obscurity in New York City in 1943.

These two events bookend the opera's six scenes. Full of gently pulsing pedal points, Morse code-like patterns, catchy folk melodies, incantatory percussion and habanera-style rhythms, Gibson's understated score forms an appropriate musical backdrop, subtly illuminating tensions that existed in Tesla's life such as his public and private personae or thoughts on science versus nature. The songlike duet between Tesla and the White Dove in scene 3, or Tesla and the chorus's haunting concluding reflections on his childhood in scene 6, appear to draw as much from the Broadway tradition as anything else. Indeed, *Violet Fire*'s dramatic structure



William Christie conducts a dramatic account of Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* live from the Salzburg Festival – see review on page 99

and expressive character in general owe more to musical theatre than to opera. Perhaps the work occasionally misses the edgier, visceral sound and energy of early minimalism. Playing the main role, tenor Scott Murphree is commanding throughout, with soprano Marie Mascari as the White Dove, contralto Solange Merdinian as Tesla's closest female friend, Katherine Johnson, and baritone Greg Purnhagen as the ever-inquisitive news reporter, all providing adequate support.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Mascagni

Cavalleria rusticana

Alexia Voulgaridou *sop* Santuzza
Marina Ogii *mez* Lola
Angelo Villari *ten* Turiddu
Devid Cecconi *bar* Alfio
Elena Zilio *mez* Lucia
Chorus and Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale, Florence / Valerio Galli

Stage directors **Luigi Di Gangi, Ugo Giacomazzi**

Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic (F) CDS7843; (F) DVD 37843; (F) Blu-ray 57843

(73^{CD}, 80^{DVD} • DDD • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, February 2019

Includes synopsis; CD includes libretto and translation



It's been a good few years for *Cav* on film, presented alongside *Pag* on fine, thought-provoking DVDs from the Royal

Opera and Salzburg Easter Festival in innovative productions by, respectively, Damiano Michieletto (Opus Arte, 12/16) and Philipp Stölzl (Sony, 5/16). This stand-alone performance of *Cavalleria rusticana* from Florence (released, as is usual with Dynamic, in audio as well as video formats) offers something more straightforward, even if Luigi Di Gangi and Ugo Giacomazzi offer a production that hints more at a post-industrial near future than a rustic 19th century.

In Federica Parolini's grungy set, large rusty panels form the backdrop, one transforming with the help of projections into the facade of a primitive church. An old bathtub sits on the stage, out of which greyed cloths are hoisted to frame the close of the Easter Hymn; Alfio's entrance is accompanied by dancing devils; totemic masks adorn a large pole raised centre stage, which provide the visual focus during an Intermezzo that is otherwise, thankfully,

unstaged. Luigi Bondi's lighting effects some sort of dawn after Turridu's opening offstage song but thereafter pays scant regard to what time of day it might be. Agnese Rabatti's costumes place the principals in something like period dress, everyone else in non-descript grey.

At heart, though, this is a traditional show, with traditional central performances to match. Angelo Villari is an effective, powerful Turiddu, his voice steady and impressive if not especially memorable. Devid Cecconi is burly of body and voice as Alfio, if a little short on dangerous allure. Marina Ogii, dressed in butter-wouldn't-melt white, is a suitably carefree Lola. Alexia Voulgaridou offers a powerfully sung, committed Santuzza but she and Elena Zilio (repeating her larger-than-life Mama Lucia from Covent Garden) might have proved more moving with less in the way of wailing, gnashing of teeth and chewing of scenery.

This release captures a solid show, then, backed up by solid conducting from Valerio Galli and fine playing and singing from the Maggio Musicale forces, but it's not one to recommend over any of the fine video or audio recordings – singly or as the traditional double bill – already out there.

Hugo Shirley

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Andrea Marcon, *Artistic Director*



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Monteverdi



L'incoronazione di Poppea

Tamara Banjesevic *sop* Fortuna/Damigella
Ana Quintans *sop* Virtù/Drusilla
Lea Desandre *mez* Amore
Sonya Yoncheva *sop* Poppea
Kate Lindsey *mez* Nerone
Stéphanie d'Oustrac *mez* Ottavia
Carlo Vistoli *counterten* Ottone
Renato Dolcini *bar* Seneca
Marcel Beekman *ten* Nutrice
Dominique Visse *counterten* Arnalta
Virgile Ancely *bass* Mercurio
Alessandro Fisher *ten* Lucano
Les Arts Florissants / William Christie

Stage director **Jan Lauwers**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

Harmonia Mundi (3 + DVD) HAF890 2622/4
 (3h 7^{CD}, 3h 16^{DVD} • DDD • NTSC • 16:9 • 5.1 &
 PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Haus für Mozart, Salzburg,
 August 2018

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



William Christie has conducted several productions of *Poppea*, including a staging by

Pier Luigi Pizzi filmed in Madrid in 2010 (Virgin/Erato). At last year's Salzburg Festival Christie revisited the opera with a mostly different cast (three singers reprise their roles) for a production by Jan Lauwers, who explains it as 'a perverse game ... the music is of a "heavenly" beauty, even seductive, which leads you into loving the bloodthirsty protagonists'.

Cruelty and violence are explored copiously, but the power-crazed protagonists are unlovable on this occasion. Kate Lindsey's intensely agitated Nerone has neurotic restlessness and edgy singing that oozes threatening instability – a relentless characterisation that leaves little room for lyrical finesse. Sonya Yoncheva's ruthless Poppea is not to be trifled with, although towards the end she appears afraid of what she has got herself into but cannot resist the lure of the throne – prioritisation of her determination and thirst for power neglects lighter charm and whispered seductiveness. The closing duet is vibrant and unsettling, is low on intimacy, and is blemished by unsteady intonation.

Renato Dolcini has eloquent gravitas with a hint of the philosopher's stubborn pomposity but there is dignity in Seneca's acceptance of destiny (even if the lowest E is lacking). Carlo Vistoli's Ottone is aptly indecisive and weak, scarcely deserving Ana Quintans's resolute Drusilla. Stéphanie

d'Oustrac's performance of the haughty Ottavia's 'Addio Roma' is profoundly moving, with time standing still at a long weeping silence before her final utterance. Arnalta's lullaby 'Oblivion soave' is sung with hushed tenderness by Dominique Visse, whereas her last scene of gloating shows the countertenor-in-drag specialist's extraordinary talent for exaggerated comedy. Marcel Beekman offers ample comic absurdity and an impressively polished high tenor register as Ottavia's Nurse. Numerous smaller roles are performed with characterful vivacity.

The lucidity of the drama is smudged by over-activity on stage from experimental dancers doing an inordinate amount of experimental dancing, often in various states of undress, and always with one of them at centre stage whirling in perpetual circular motion until the next dancer on the rota gives them a cuddle and relieves them. Characters with no business being on stage lurk persistently without purpose and contradict theatrical sense. Ottone does not disguise himself in Drusilla's clothes for the attempt on Poppea's life, rendering the rest of Act 3 inexplicable.

Some of the numerous cuts are obtrusive. For example, lines in the confrontation between Nerone and Seneca are missing, Ottone's reluctant acquiescence to Ottavia's blackmail is removed, and so are several passages from his attempted murder of Poppea at the end of Act 2. Drusilla's heroic self-sacrifice when accused of attempted murder is reduced to a bare minimum and much of Ottone's courageous interruption to save her is missing – even their trial is removed.

An integral virtue of the production is the prominence accorded to instrumentalists, divided between two onstage shallow pits at the forestage. Numerous continuo players (three theorbos, harp, two viols, cello, dulcian, double bass and two keyboardists including Christie) pay avid attention to what is happening further up on stage. Upper instruments including recorder and two cornettos play sinfonias spiritedly, and occasionally they double the voices – a practice that sometimes works but regrettably distorts the three-part madrigalian lament 'Non morir, Seneca, no'.

This unadulterated live recording is issued as a small hardback book containing three CDs and a DVD. Whether you want to concentrate on purely musical and textual dimensions using the audio-only format and the libretto or to engage with attributes of the interpretation that emerge more clearly from the visual production,

the combination of both is an immersive experience. **David Vickers**

Offenbach

La Périchole

Aude Extrême *mez* La Périchole
Stanislas de Barbeyrac *ten* Piquillo
Alexandre Duhamel *bar* Don Andrès de Ribeira
Marc Mauillon *ten* Don Pedro de Hinoyosa
Éric Huchet *ten* Don Miguel de Panatellas
Olivia Doray *sop* Guadalupe/Manuelita
Julie Pasturaud *mez* Berginella/Frasquinella
Mérodie Ruvio *contr* Mastrilla/Ninetta
Enguerrand de Hys *ten* First Lawyer/Marquis
François Pardailhé *ten* Second Lawyer
Adriana Bignagni Lesca *mez* Brambilla
Jean Sclavis *ten* Prisoner

Chorus of Bordeaux National Opera;

Les Musiciens du Louvre / Marc Minkowski

Bru Zane (2) BZ1036 (103' • DDD)

Recorded live, October 14-16, 2018

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



If you wanted proof of the adage that whereas English operetta is all about class, French operetta is all about sex (and other appetites

too), Offenbach's *La Périchole* could be Exhibit A. Based on a libretto by Meilhac and Halévy, this *opéra-bouffe* takes place – not unlike their better-known *opéra-comique* *Carmen* – in a plausibly exotic setting, in this case Peru under Spanish rule. In order to become the official mistress of the Viceroy Don Andrès, the penniless street-singer La Périchole must first marry. The problem is that her husband-of-convenience is her actual sweetheart Piquillo – but he's too drunk to realise it. And so, almost, is she. It's testimony to Offenbach's fundamental good nature that he makes something rather touching out of this whole incorrigibly Gallic premise before, inevitably, it accelerates into out-and-out farce.

But what a delight it is to see a new operetta recording presented as handsomely as this! Like all of the Bru Zane opera series, it's a thing of physical beauty: a hardback book containing several interesting and insightful essays as well as – happy day! – a complete libretto and translation. That's particularly necessary, because for this live Opéra de Bordeaux performance, Marc Minkowski has conflated the 1868 and 1874 versions of the score into a personal edition that doesn't quite correspond to any other recorded version. In the pit are Les Musiciens du Louvre – part of a growing and welcome trend towards

giving operetta the benefits of historically informed practice.

You can hear the result from the very first bars: springy, lean, with the underlying dance rhythms (Minkowski favours brisk tempos) bouncing naturally up from the bass, and the woodwinds alternately flashing and tinting the music in watercolour shades. It's not a luxurious sound, but it's vivid and subtle and it conveys the vibrant immediacy of a piece of live theatre: for me, always a valid trade-off for an occasional ragged chorus and yards of spoken dialogue. You've got all the thumps, bangs and noises off that you'd expect in a live performance and you can feel the performers responding to the crowd. Alexandre Duhamel as Don Andr  s practically bellows the walls down in the Act 3 dungeon scene, and even La P  richole herself – a usually dignified Aude Extr  mo – can't quite resist hamming it up in her famous (and uproarious) drunken aria, 'Ah, quel diner'.

That aside, the principals are very much inside their parts. It's not really comparing like with like to judge Extr  mo's sultry, wide-grained mezzo against the silken vocal allure of Teresa Berganza on the classic 1981 Plasson recording; but she has no trouble finding the requisite pathos in P  richole's Act 1 Letter Song, and she's matched in that regard by Stanislas de Barbeyrac's Piquillo: more brazen and more blustery than Carreras on the Plasson set, it's true, but at least he makes his inebriated cadenza sound like a joke, rather than Carr  ras's piece of solf  ge. Duhamel's cocoa-voiced teddy bear of a Don Andr  s heads up a lively and idiomatic set of minor roles, and adds just enough menace to the general *op  ra-bouffe* absurdity as the plot spins to its entertainingly improbable conclusion. It's a real pleasure; and if world-class singing is not your first priority, this set can be recommended without hesitation. **Richard Bratby**

Selected comparison:

Plasson (10/82^R, 8/19) (WARN) 9029 54995-7

Puccini

Madama Butterfly

Olga Busuioc *sop*..... Madama Butterfly
Joshua Guerrero *ten*.....Pinkerton
Michael Sumuel *bass-bar*.....Sharpless
Elizabeth DeShong *mez*..... Suzuki
Carlo Bosi *ten*.....Goro
Simon Mechlinski *bar*.....Prince Yamadori
Ida R  nzl  v *mez*.....Kate Pinkerton
Oleg Budaratskiy *bass*.....Bonze
The Glyndebourne Chorus; London Philharmonic Orchestra / Omer Meir Wellber

Stage director Annilese Miskimmon

Video director Fran  ois Roussillon

Opus Arte    DVD OA1167D;    Blu-ray OABD7166D
 (143' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, June 21, 2018

Includes synopsis



Forget the cherry blossom and other japonaiserie, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* at Glyndebourne focuses on the seedier side of the story – in Act 1, at least – in Annilese Miskimmon's production. It was unveiled in 2016 for the Glyndebourne Tour before opening the main festival last summer.

Miskimmon shifts the action to post-war Japan, Act 1 set not in the little house with sliding paper doors that Pinkerton has rented – just like his bride – but in downtown Nagasaki, where sailors are signing up to 'quickie' weddings with the local girls. Goro's marriage-broking service is located next to a tattoo parlour and sailors file in and out to get hitched. Pinkerton puts his feet up on the desk, unable to take it seriously at all. Path   newsreel footage shows Japanese war brides in the early 1950s – a miscalculation, I feel, as Pinkerton never had any intention of taking his bride back home to the United States. It's an unsentimental approach. Just when you think Miskimmon is succumbing to Puccini's ecstatic love duet – the walls opening out to reveal a starlit sky – Goro enters, counting his profits.

After this sharp, cynical opening act, the rest of Miskimmon's staging is disappointingly conventional. We are outside Pinkerton's house, which Cio-Cio-San has turned into an all-American home, surrounded by silhouetted trees. To ram home the point, she and Suzuki collect flowers in a huge 'Stars and Stripes'. The suicide is well handled, Cio-Cio-San interrupted by the sudden appearance of her son, whom she gives a warship to play with.

The cast is solid without being outstanding. Moldovan soprano Olga Busuioc, a pupil of Mirella Freni, sings well, with ample tone, her interpretation having grown during the run at Glyndebourne. Joshua Guerrero comes across well vocally as Pinkerton – he sounded under-powered in the house – and there's even sympathy for his laddish naval officer when he pours out his regret in 'Addio, fiorito asil'. Michael Sumuel makes little of the role of Sharpless, found wanting in his upper register, but Carlo Bosi is terrific as the seedy Goro. The finest singer here is Elizabeth DeShong

as a sincere, affecting Suzuki, her plum tones ripe and round. Omer Meir Wellber conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra in a similarly ripe performance, alert and dramatic to Puccini's score, but never overwhelming his singers.

This recording doesn't displace the recent Royal Opera version with Antonio Pappano conducting a starry cast – led by Ermonela Jaho's affecting Cio-Cio-San and also featuring DeShong – but is worth seeing, especially for its provocative Act 1.

Mark Pullinger

Selected comparison:

Pappano (12/18) (OPAR)

DVD OA1268D; Blu-ray OABD7244D

Rihm

Jakob Lenz

Georg Nigl *bar*.....Lenz

Henry Waddington *bass-bar*.....Oberlin

John Graham-Hall *ten*.....Kaufmann

La Monnaie Symphony Orchestra / Fran  k Ollu

Stage director Andrea Breth

Video director Myriam Hoyer

Alpha    DVD ALPHA717

(73' • NTSC • 16:9 • 5.1 • 0 • s)

Recorded live, March 2015

Includes synopsis



'I can't bear it any more', cries the troubled protagonist of Wolfgang Rihm's chamber opera from 1979, and we're

barely a minute in. Life doesn't get any easier for this model victim-hero of the *Sturm und Drang* movement. During the next hour and a quarter he receives lodging from Pastor Oberlin and advice from Kaufmann, a possessive friend. All to no avail: the voices in his head win out. Things get very messy (this is not a piece for weak stomachs).

Faithful as Andrea Breth is to this claustrophobic tale of gloom, her staging lends both dignity to the poet's plight and deserved lightness of being to Rihm's setting of B  chner's novella. Previous stagings – there have been many, though only two in the UK – have not always resisted the temptation to present Lenz as an archetype of madness, a Wozzeck in poet's clothing, from the off.

Once given more than underpants to wear in the fourth of the opera's 13 brief scenes, Georg Nigl presents a rounded and intensely sympathetic portrait of Lenz, always in dialogue not only with his two companions but with himself, his one-time lover Friederike and Rihm's time-travelling musical textures. Through them we shuttle

without pastiche between the 18th-century world of the real-life Lenz, the early 19th of Schumann and Weber on the verge of a nervous breakdown, the early 20th of Expressionist Schoenberg and the late 20th of the young Rihm.

Directed with assurance by Franck Ollu, the 12-strong band includes a harpsichord and three cellos but no upper strings. Chorale melodies are reserved for moments of climatic pathos, but at 24 Rihm was no mere epigone of Berg and Zimmermann: *Jakob Lenz* is a young man's opera, bold, angry and convinced of its own force, no less the work of a disturbingly ingenious mind than Adès's *Powder Her Face*. Even were the 1984 Deutsche Harmonia Mundi recording made commercially available, it would not present serious competition to the outstanding vocal and dramatic performances of Nigl, Henry Waddington and John Graham-Hall. **Peter Quantrill**

Rossini

Eduardo e Cristina

Kenneth Tarver *ten*..... Carlo
Silvia Dalla Benetta *sop*..... Cristina
Laura Polverelli *mez*..... Eduardo
Baurzhan Anderzhanov *bass*..... Giacomo
Xiang Xu *ten*..... Atlei
Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań; Virtuosi Brunensis / Gianluigi Gelmetti

Naxos ® ② 8 660466/7 (141' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad, Germany, July 14, 16 & 17, 2017

Includes synopsis; Italian libretto available from naxos.com



Eduardo e Cristina is the operatic pastiche Rossini cobbled

together for Venice's Teatro San Benedetto in the spring of 1819. It was a contract he should never have signed, such were his existing

commitments to the Teatro San Carlo in Naples. His latest opera, *Ermione*, had opened there on March 27 and its successor, *La donna del lago*, due in late October, was already in the early stages of composition. To retrieve the situation, he commissioned a rewrite of a libretto, first used by Pavesi in Naples 1810, to which he fitted music from three of his most recent operas: *Adelaide di Borgogna*, *Ricciardo e Zoraide* and *Ermione* itself, following its summary removal from the San Carlo repertory after just five performances. It was a ploy that worked. *Eduardo e Cristina* was cheered to the rafters by the Venetians. Indeed, it went on to be lauded throughout Europe, as star singers made their own additions to the smorgasbord of items already taken from Rossini's works.

In 1997 the Rossini in Wildbad festival staged the pastiche in a new performing edition by the Swedish musicologist Anders Wiklund. And it was this that was revived in 2017. Audience reaction suggests that it made an agreeable evening in the theatre. However, it is a rather different story on record, given that neither the recycled music nor the drama – a dramatically inert tale of the tangled love-life of a Swedish princess and her warrior husband – is of any great distinction.

It's good to have an experienced Rossinian, Gianluigi Gelmetti, in charge of the musical proceedings, and there are two excellent lead singers: Kenneth Tarver as the Swedish king and mezzo-soprano Laura Polverelli in the *travesti* role of his unwanted son-in-law. Unfortunately, the eponymous Swedish princess disappoints. Other drawbacks include inconsistent and often poorly balanced recorded sound, and an absence of pertinent background information on the opera itself – in this instance, what, precisely, comes from where? – of the kind usually provided by Naxos in these generally well-edited Wildbad booklets. **Richard Osborne**

R Strauss

Salome

Asmik Grigorian *sop*..... Salome
Gábor Bretz *bass*..... Jokanaan
John Daszak *ten*..... Herod
Anna Maria Chiuri *mez*..... Herodias
Julian Prégardien *ten*..... Narraboth
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Franz Welser-Möst

Stage director **Romeo Castellucci**

Video director **Henning Kasten**

Unitel/C Major Entertainment ® DVD 801608;

® 801704 (112' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Felsenreitschule, Salzburg, July 24, 26 & 28, 2018

Includes synopsis



Romeo Castellucci's production of *Salome* bowled me over at last summer's Salzburg Festival. I'm pleased to

report that it transfers to the small screen with electrifying power, particularly due to Asmik Grigorian's remarkable debut in the title-role.

The Italian director takes direct inspiration from the city's Felsenreitschule itself. Hewn into the Mönchsberg rock, the 'Rock Riding School' was a cavalry stables before being turned into one of the festival's theatres. Castellucci camouflages the 96 arcades at the back of the stage, filling the void to create a stony, suffocating atmosphere before a single note of Strauss's score sounds, cicadas chirruping restlessly in the heat. Across the frontcloth are the words *Te saxa loquuntur* ('The stones speak of you'), the inscription above Sigmundstor, the tunnel that slices through the Mönchsberg.

Castellucci's *Salome* is riddled with enigmas. At the start, blood is already being wiped from the stage's golden floor even

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before a drop has been shed. The moon is eclipsed, blacked out, so that much of the action plays out in shadow. Salome praises Jokanaan's white skin, yet his voice thunders from a black void, the prophet daubed in tar, feathers and fur before being hosed down by stableboys. The prophet is also represented by a black stallion that careers around the cistern as Salome writhes on her back in a sexual fantasy, having donned a saddle and toyed with riding tackle – another Felsenreitschule reference – when Jokanaan rejects her. Salome does not perform the Dance of the Seven Veils. Instead, she is strapped, half-naked, in the foetal position to Herod's throne, and a block of stone slowly descends as if to crush her, to petrify her into the rock. And when Salome demands Jokanaan's head on a silver platter as her reward, she is instead served up his headless body in a pool of milk, plus the head of his black stallion alter ego.

Weird? Very much so, and the production's perversity stopped me from awarding the full five stars ... and yet it's the staging that haunted me most last year. I still don't pretend to fathom everything Castellucci does, but repeated viewing has made me admire it even more. Annoyingly, not all the production details are captured on this Blu-ray, the video director missing the slicing of the frontcloth before the music begins – a significant moment – and the finale doesn't really show the giant black silk balloon that engulfs the stage.

Asmik Grigorian's erotically charged Salome is outstanding and the main reason you should at least try to see this performance even if the production doesn't appeal. The Lithuanian soprano sings the role superbly, a lighter soprano than many of the tungsten-plated heavies heard elsewhere, but flecked with steel nonetheless. She has no problem riding the might of the Vienna Philharmonic, and her initial 'Gib mir den Kopf des Jokanaan!' is deliciously caressed before being repeated as an intimidating, petulant snarl. She is a terrific actress, too; sulky, steamy and manipulative.

Despite being shrouded in darkness, the Hungarian bass Gábor Bretz makes a vocal impact as Jokanaan, while John Daszak is an intriguing Herod, less neurotic than most, perhaps, though horrified at Salome's demands. Anna Maria Chiuri is a suitably ghastly Herodias, while Julian Prégardien is a sweet-toned Narraboth, sung with a Lieder singer's care and attention. Franz Welser-Möst conducts a terrific account of Strauss's score, the Vienna Philharmonic on scintillating form. Not to be missed.

Mark Pullinger

Tchaikovsky

The Queen of Spades

Brandon Jovanovich *ten* Herman
Evgenia Muraveva *sop* Lisa
Hanna Schwarz *sop* Countess
Vladislav Sulimsky *bar* Count Tomskey
Igor Golovatenko *bar* Prince Yeletsky
Oksana Volkova *mez* Polina
Alexander Kravets *ten* Chekalinsky
Stanislav Trofimov *bass* Surin
Pavel Petrov *ten* Chaplitsky
Gleb Peryazev *bass* Narumov
Salzburg Festival and Theatre Children's Chorus;
Vienna State Opera Chorus; Vienna Philharmonic
Orchestra / Mariss Jansons

Stage director **Hans Neuenfels**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

Unitel/C Major Entertainment

© **DVD** 801408; © **Blu-ray** 801504 (3h 3' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus,

Salzburg, 2018

Includes synopsis



Mariss Jansons has played many hands of *The Queen of Spades*. Within the past decade alone, the Latvian conductor has recorded

Tchaikovsky's psychodrama with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and led performances at the Dutch National Opera with the Royal Concertgebouw that were recorded for DVD/Blu-ray. Now comes another production taped for the same format from the 2018 Salzburg Festival.

Why did Jansons roll the dice again? Well, the Vienna Philharmonic probably sweetened the deal. They are the aces in the pack here and play with silken elegance, particularly those walnut-toned strings. Jansons's adoration for the music is clear, and the glitter and allure of the score is almost tangible. His languorous tempo choices, on the other hand, can err to the self-indulgent. This opera is a ghost story and a thriller (with a brilliant twist ending) but Jansons is not one to turn the screw.

If the music sounds sumptuous, however, it's mostly gritty austerity on stage. Seventeen years after Hans Neuenfels created a local scandal in his Salzburg staging of *Die Fledermaus*, he returns with an emotionally neutral production. Christian Schmidt's sets – mostly midnight blue and voluminous black – are the bare frame for costumes (Reinhard von der Thannen) that include Hermann's toy-soldier uniform, mysteriously minus a shirt, fetish-style rubber and, for the women's

chorus, exaggerated saggy breasts. This is essentially a study of a society in decay, in which the lead characters seek only a way out. When Catherine the Great makes her cameo at the end of Act 2, she is greeted as 'our tender mother' but represented by a gaudy skeleton.

There is some striking imagery here but this opera demands a creepier seam, as well as some old-fashioned *coups de théâtre*. Neuenfels seems determined to avoid such splashy theatrics, which leaves his cast a little rudderless and makes the wide-open stage of the Grosses Festspielhaus look even more vast. Hanna Schwarz's veteran Countess has the right raddled energy for the role and her death – utterly bald, she gratefully reaches for Hermann's revolver – is suitably yucky; but there's no real context for her character and her spooky return from the grave is underwhelming. Likewise, Evgenia Muraveva's Lisa, who sings with impressive, even tone, is not supported by all the studied blankness around her.

There is more to get your teeth into from Brandon Jovanovich's committed Herman, sung with surprisingly graceful suppleness (if pushed at times), and from Igor Golovatenko's impassioned Yeletsky, much more than the usual princely patsy. Vladislav Sulimsky's Tomskey provides decent support but his pivotal narration is under-energised. All in all, there is serious quality here but piquancy is what this *Pique Dame* is lacking. **Neil Fisher**

Wagner

Lohengrin

Piotr Beczala *ten* Lohengrin
Anja Harteros *sop* Elsa
Waltraud Meier *sop* Ortrud
Tomasz Konieczny *bass-bar* Telramund
Georg Zeppenfeld *bass* King Henry
Egils Siliņš *bass-bar* Herald
Chorus and Orchestra of the Bayreuth Festival / Christian Thielemann

Stage director **Yuval Sharon**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

DG © ② **DVD** 073 5616GH2; © **Blu-ray** 073 5621GH (3h 29' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS5.0 • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Bayreuth Festival, 2018



It's a crucial pleasure to be able to keep in touch now with the latest productions from Wagner HQ thanks

to DG's (and Bavarian Radio's) regular preservation of the year before's premiere. Of course, not every product of Katharina Wagner and Christian Thielemann's



Piotr Beczala and Anja Harteros are part of an excellent cast in Wagner's *Lohengrin* from last year's Bayreuth Festival

regime can be an imaginative success and, for this viewer, the latest offering of a new *Lohengrin* falls some way behind its predecessors, throwing up successive questions about what we're seeing while providing few penetrating answers.

Yet what we hear is outstanding. Bayreuth administrations have long dreamt of casting this, Wagner's last 'romantic opera', with singers from outside the specialist Wagner discipline – Wieland Wagner talked of Mario Del Monaco in the title-role and Maria Callas as Ortrud. The 2018 production already hosts Polish tenor Piotr Beczala, famed for his Italian roles, and Bayreuth tried this year as well to alternate Krassimira Stoyanova and Anna Netrebko as Elsa. Beczala, who has already filmed the part with Thielemann in Dresden (A/17), sounds to fit the title-role like a glove – with both the Italianate sound that one may dream of and more than enough stamina to sustain its length. Opposite him Anja Harteros (who has also already filmed her role, in Munich – Decca, 9/10) brings to Elsa fluency, strength and impeccable diction. Meier's experience of the role and maturity bring dark character benefits to her Ortrud; Tomasz Konieczny is a lively, punkish, firm-voiced Telramund;

Zeppenfeld and Siliņš are impeccable as King and Herald.

No complaints there. One may wish, in the idealist of worlds, that Thielemann's handling of Wagner's earlier operas would have listened a little more to period practice; but that's never been his way, so – with 'big' Romantic Wagner as a given – this is a fine and thoroughly achieved way of doing it.

The stage production has been admired by credible authorities but it strikes me as both looking ugly and being essentially shallow. The space and costumes are blue – the synaesthetic colour of the work according to Thomas Mann and Wagner himself. Defunct apparatus of disrupted electrical power sparks back into fully lit life at major events connected with *Lohengrin* – his arrival (which also frees Elsa from being burnt at the stake) and his overcoming of Telramund's assassination attempt in Act 3. OK, these could be a symbol of the Brabant people's loss of spiritual (aka Christian) belief until a redeemer comes and may even explain why the returned Gottfried at the end is (literally) a Green Man introducing a more acceptable form of power.

But – and I apologise for listing questions: why are all in (wrong period)

costumes that could transfer directly into Verdi's *Ernani* or *Don Carlo*; why do all the soloists have pantomime fairy wings attached; why does the Act 1 fight take place with flying doubles (not well done either, as filmed); and is Elsa tied up so much just to indicate she's trapped in helpless obedience to *Lohengrin* (this includes an orange bondage rope in the couple's bedroom, appearing shortly after they've had a bedtime reading session from what look like Gideon Bibles)? The chorus – and they are a terrific acting chorus – and soloists clearly needed a choreographer to routine the random selection of stylised movements handed out to them. Also the basic blocking (where characters move and stand) often denies important people sufficient presence at key moments.

Opus Arte from Bayreuth (under Andris Nelsons, 10/12) or Berlin (under Kent Nagano, 7/10) and Decca from Munich will more than cover for your small-screen *Lohengrin* needs, plus other more conservative options from Vienna and America. The present new release provides outstanding listening but annoyance and frustration to watch.

Mike Ashman

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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Shahbaz Hussain & Helen Anahita Wilson

Diwan

Golden Girl Records © GOLDG002



Inspired, often off-the-cuff stuff from two musicians whose pairing, unlikely on paper, makes perfect sense on a debut that deftly

combines just-so minimalism with dizzying flights of fancy. Brighton-based Wilson is a classically-trained composer and multi-instrumentalist whose PhD studies at SOAS involve researching Indian karnatic classical music. Hussain, a Rochdale resident, is an award-winning tabla virtuoso with technical versatility and an inventive streak nurtured by studies with legendary elders including Ustad Alla Rakha, a frequent accompanist of Ravi Shankar. Opener 'Azar' is a trippy, rhythmic joust boasting five different time

cycles and a cornucopia of everything from Persian melodies to baroque counterpoint, all of it buoyed by a seven-note jazz riff on piano. Each track is similarly imaginative: based on a traditional tabla solo in a seven-beat time cycle, 'Carneline' incorporates a central repeated piano pattern over which Wilson magics bright freeform improvisations. Refreshment for the ears. **Jane Cornwell**

Raymond MacDonald/Marilyn Crispell

Songs Along The Way

Babel Label © BDV17149



This is the second album from the US-Scottish duo of Marilyn Crispell and Raymond MacDonald, partly recorded in the studio and partly live, at the Vortex in East

London. Crispell, who has long been resident in Woodstock, New York, earned her spurs with Anthony Braxton; MacDonald, who is based in Glasgow, is a professor at Glasgow Caledonian University and an influential presence on the Scottish jazz scene. What they have in common above all is the spirit of improvisation. As the *New York Times* said of Crispell: 'Hearing Marilyn Crispell play solo piano is like monitoring an active volcano. She is one of a very few pianists who rise to the challenge of free jazz.' There are some notable eruptions here, not least during the 13-minute 'Vortex', an explosion of squawks, honks and clatters, which directly precedes the lovely and extremely restrained version of the traditional tune 'We Are Going'. The music is part-composed, part-improvised, and combines tenderness and asperity in a thoroughly engaging manner. **Robert Shore**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Guo Gan Trio

Gobi Desert

Felmay © FY8207



This new trio recording by prolific Chinese erhu (spike fiddle) master Guo Gan is an attempt to fuse the music of seemingly far-flung regions. His collaborators are the Turkish bağlama (lute) virtuoso Emre Gültekin and Levent Yildirim, an expert on Middle Eastern percussion. Although the trio takes on Guo Gan's name, the composition and arrangement duties are split evenly between himself and Gültekin – the latter contributing the epic 15-minute piece 'Kocaoglan Paçarani'.

There's an impeccable blend between the instruments, with the soaring, dreamlike quality of the erhu being grounded by the earthy resonance of Yildirim's frame

drums. Gültekin's multi-tracked bağlama and tanbur combine to stunningly hypnotic effect, conjuring some of the albums most thrilling moments. Guo Gan's pieces enjoy an accessible melodicism, while Gültekin's have a brooding, almost mystical intensity. 'Harput' exemplifies the latter with the trio joined by a Sufi-like chorus. Much of Guo Gan's most interesting and vital work has sprung from collaboration, and this album continues this tradition brilliantly.

Charlie Cawood

Rowan Rheingans

The Lines We Draw Together

Red Dress Records © RDRLP01



Rheingans' one-woman theatre piece, *Dispatches on the Red Dress*, chronicles her grandmother's experiences in 1940s

Germany. This solo debut is an extension of that live show. It's spacious, elegant stuff. Drawing not only on family memories of war, but also the diaries of Etty Hillesum, a Dutch woman killed at Auschwitz, sparse existential meditations are complemented by delicate, rhythmic melodies.

Rheingans is unafraid to pause and let the silence in, or the birdsong, or the sound of children on a street outside. When a particularly fine turn of phrase or musical hook appears, she will repeat it, loop it, sit with it and let its magic infuse the wider song.

She is beautifully assisted by a host of guests, notably clarinettist Jack McNeill, bassist Michele Stodart and percussionist Laurence Hunt, whose light, brushed and insistent rhythmic accompaniment is the making of one of the standout tracks, 'Traces'. **Nathaniel Handy**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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A great mezzo celebrated

Hugo Shirley reviews a fine Brigitte Fassbaender set

Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since **Brigitte Fassbaender** retired, quitting while she was ahead much in the way that another great mezzo, Janet Baker, had done some five years before her. The two singers, both supremely moving, could hardly be more different, but comparison in some ways helps highlight what makes Fassbaender, who turned 80 in July, who she is. If Baker is restrained, regal and noble, Fassbaender is urgent, impetuous and even mischievous. Baker's voice was beautifully steady, Fassbaender's in a state, it seems, of constant flux, a mix of rhubarb and cream – luxurious and rich but with a tart edge – with a fiery schnapps on the side. Add in a darting, questing mind (still very much in evidence when I met her five years ago for a riotously enjoyable 75th-birthday interview) and you end up with one of the most probing, intelligent and immediately recognisable singers of the second half of the 20th century.

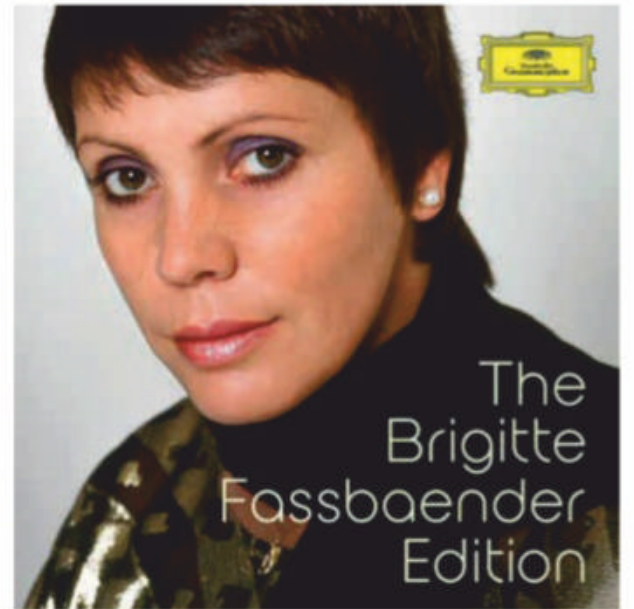
As such, a mere 11 discs doesn't really seem adequate to celebrate her landmark birthday. But Brigitte Fassbaender was not the most completist or monogamous recording artist. It's a discography – in the studio at least – that doesn't include several of her greatest operatic roles. This defining Octavian can only be seen or heard on live recordings of *Der Rosenkavalier*, and it's a similar situation with her Countess Geschwitz (*Lulu*), Klytemnestra (*Elektra*), Amneris (*Aida*) and Charlotte (*Werther*). And the solo recordings made for DG, which make up the bulk of this box, mainly cover the final dozen or so years of her career, when Lieder became the primary focus. Any Fassbaender fan will need to complement DG's anniversary issue with the many recordings she made for EMI (including a uniquely powerful *Winterreise*) and other gems from around and about the catalogue.

There's nevertheless a great deal to enjoy here, with over half the discs straightforward reissues of full albums – some returning to the catalogue after a period of absence. Aribert Reimann was Fassbaender's partner in that EMI *Winterreise* and they followed up on DG with *Schwanengesang* (reconfigured with an additional five Seidl settings) as well as a fascinating *Schöne Müllerin* from 1993 (including narrations of the unset poems).

Has there ever been a more wrenchingly moving Gurrelieder Wood Dove?

The latter was recorded, Fassbaender suggests in a brief but characteristically forthright and probing booklet interview, perhaps a little too late for her. No such concerns, though, with her superb Loewe album (with Cord Garben), in which she's uniquely heartbreaking in 'Ach neige, du Schmerzenreiche' ('among the great Goethe settings', she notes), brilliantly engaging in the wittier numbers.

She makes a persuasive case for Loewe's *Frauenliebe*, too, which can be compared with her terrific account of Schumann's better-known cycle, characteristically full of urgency and spirit (nothing docile or domesticated here) and coupled with Heine songs, including the Op 24 *Liederkreis*, a beautifully leisurely 'Mein Wagen rollet langsam' and an 'Entflieh mit mir und sei mein Weib' launched with irresistible gusto. Then comes the *Gramophone* Award-winning album of Richard Strauss and Liszt (recorded in 1985-86), as fresh and probing as ever. A Decca recital of Wolf's *Mörike Lieder* with Jean-Yves Thibaudet from 1992 is every bit as fine. Disc 8 is the terrific album of Mahler orchestral songs she recorded with Riccardo Chailly and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin.



So far, so recommendable. But DG's compilers are less sure what to do when you get away from the straightforward business of reissuing complete albums. Disc 7 ends up a bit of a dog's dinner, albeit, at over 84 minutes, a very generous one. It offers us just 12 songs of the 18 first released on a Liszt recital with Thibaudet; just eight of Dvořák's *Moravian Duets* (*auf Deutsch*) from a complete album of duets with Juliane Banse originally released on Koch Schwann; and then 10 Brahms ensembles with the crack team Fassbaender made up with Edith Mathis, Peter Schreier and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

Fassbaender's moving songs in Giulini's *Lied von der Erde* are presented on their own alongside Brahms and Mussorgsky on disc 9, and her contributions to Giulini's *Trovatore*, Kleiber's *Tristan* and Chailly's *Gurrelieder* (has there ever been a more wrenchingly moving Wood Dove?) make up the next disc. Disc 11, meanwhile, takes snippets from early recordings of Alessandro Scarlatti (from 1964), Mozart operas, *Hänsel und Gretel* and Pfitzner's *Palestrina*, plus a two-minute glimpse of her cameo in Sinopoli's *Manon Lescaut* and a couple of brilliant, irresistible samplers of her Orlovsky in the Previn *Fledermaus* – anyone unconvinced or unaware of Fassbaender's remarkable art could do worse than just sampling those two to be won over in a trice. **G**

THE RECORDING

'The Brigitte Fassbaender Edition'

DG © 11 483 6913

István Kertész and Decca's Vienna legacy

Peter Quantrill listens to a collection of the Hungarian conductor's Austrian recordings

After George Szell's death in 1970, **István Kertész** was the overwhelming favourite of the Cleveland Orchestra members to succeed him as Music Director. The board opted instead for Lorin Maazel – who had also just turned 40 – perhaps bearing in mind the brilliance and intensity of his early recordings. While sharing Szell's background, Kertész distanced himself from his Hungarian émigré heritage – understandably so, not only to make his own mark but because he shunned an autocratic style of leadership; you can hardly imagine either Szell or Maazel remarking, as Kertész did to Alan Blyth (1/68), that 'You must not be a dictator. If you have 80 players in front of you, they must somehow feel that you are the 81st.'

Such collegial tendencies made him a natural fit for the musicians of the Vienna Philharmonic, who have responded best to conductors who guide rather than goad them into action (Bernstein being the exception that proves the rule). In his not-always reliable memoirs, John Culshaw claimed responsibility for signing Kertész to Decca and to the Viennese, 'and in due course he fulfilled all expectations except those of the Viennese, who did not like him because he was Hungarian'.

István Kertész's collegial tendencies made him a natural fit for the musicians of the Vienna Philharmonic

Be that as it may, they made their first record together in May 1961, a *New World* Symphony placed at the end of this Decca box. Its vivid engineering, hefty impact at climaxes and uncontrived grandeur of manner are shared by the music-making in the box as a whole; but so too are the unreliable orchestral balances, often doing Dvořák's wind-writing no favours, slips of coordination and slight but pervasive rhythmic instability.

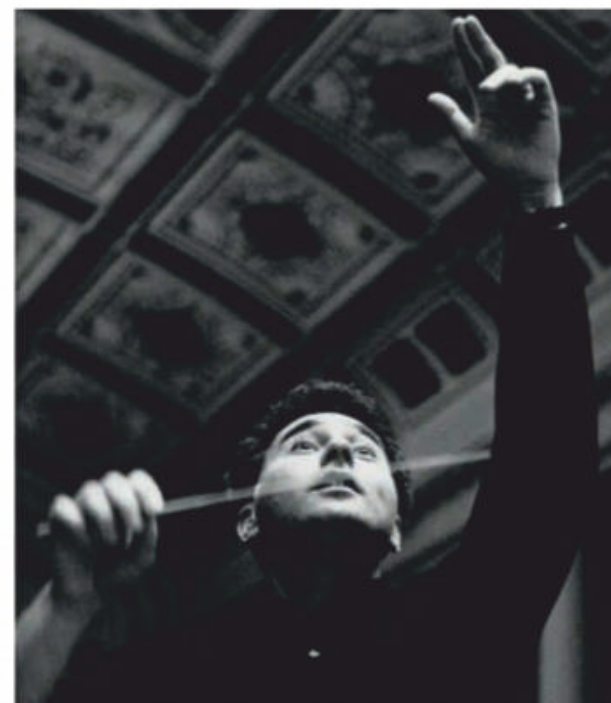
Quizzed by an American interviewer about the differences between this recording and his LSO remake from five years later, Kertész wisely refused to be drawn except to observe that 'when I realised how great the difference was between them, it was quite a shock for me – a healthy shock, because an artist has to grow ... and if the artist can survive the shock, one will be better'. Writing his

newly published and addictively readable memoirs (*Bow to Baton*: 2019), the LSO leader of the era John Georgiadis returned to their Dvořák cycle, long a staple of the Decca catalogue, and found that 'they were really not accurate enough to be good records, there being too many technical errors, while the essential musicianship of the man just wasn't, as is mostly the case, transmitted through the vinyl. In reality, it seems he was a man for the moment and not for the record.'

It's a judgement borne out by the fire and collective inspiration of concert broadcasts from Cleveland, Philadelphia and Chicago. Older collectors often lavish praise on Kertész for the naturalness and unforced sensibility of his recordings, and it's true that the VPO could play Mozart and Schubert in their sleep. Unfortunately they seem to be doing just that in the *Haffner*, for example, and a pairing of the Mozart G minor symphonies chiselled out of granite. Kertész measured himself against the music of Mozart above all others, but the set's nadir comes with a grim and remorseless plod through the Requiem (acknowledged as such in Andrew Stewart's persuasive booklet essay). The E flat Symphony, No 39, was a speciality of his, but in Vienna the majestic introduction hangs fire, tied to the bar line.

Glimpses of the Kertész temperament peek through a *Linz* Symphony of unstudied grace, *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* – surprisingly nimble in context – and the last two symphonies of Schubert. These were all recorded in 1963; eight years later the Schubert cycle was completed without recapturing form, with minuets and trios like lumpy custard. Flickers of tension animate three overtures – sadly not *Rosamunde*, another speciality of this conductor – which presage the final VPO Kertész symphonic cycle, of Brahms. The big-boned, muscular style of their music-making together had found a suit large enough to fit the Third and Fourth in particular. If only the wind intonation were more reliable and the horns less overbearing.

The month after Kertész drowned while swimming off the coast near Tel Aviv in April 1973, a conductor-less VPO completed their *Haydn* Variations recording, which was duly issued with black edging. A trio of operatic projects stands as a more enduring memorial to their relationship, beginning with *Don Pasquale*



Kertész: a man for the moment and not for the record

from 1964. Kertész thickens up the scoring while drawing more quicksilver responses from the orchestra than in their symphonic collaborations: big-band Donizetti, none the less enjoyable for that, backing a cast better on paper than in front of the microphones, though perhaps not deserving of Harold Rosenthal's 'singularly dull and unidiomatic' verdict.

There followed in 1967 the first complete *Clemenza di Tito* on record, and here the solo singing stands up to the best modern rivals, led by Berganza (Sesto) and Fassbaender (Annio) on imperious form. Even finer is the 'Mozart Opera Festival' from four years later, featuring Fassbaender again ('Voi che sapete', less youthful than usual but burning with ardour) and a chamber-size 'Wiener Haydn-Orchester' assembled for the sessions by the producer Christopher Raeburn. Kertész prized Mozart the serious joker – he talked of *Figaro* as 'a revolutionary piece following Beaumarchais combined with great sex' – and his pliant direction allows Lucia Popp to shine in 'L'amerò, sarò costante' as well as making Werner Krenn a worthy rival to Wunderlich in 'Dies Bildnis'. Happily the album is available separately from Australian Eloquence, like much else here, and for all the fresh remastering and carefully assembled packaging of the new set, complete with original album covers, cautious readers may want to pick the cherries from 'Kertész in Vienna'. **G**

THE RECORDING

'István Kertész in Vienna'

Decca © (20 discs) +  483 4710

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(violin)

Conductor — Vladimir Jurowski

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R. Wagner 'Das Rheingold'

Conductor — Vladimir Jurowski

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Alexander Buzlov (cello)

Conductor — Vasily Petrenko

December 29, 2019

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Alexandra Kadurina (mezzo-soprano)

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BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan offers a personal selection of some worthwhile CD bargains

One of the many memorable quotes drawn from the thoughts of composer-conductor Michael Gielen, who died earlier this year at the age of 91, is: 'I cannot live with the conscience of the truth being there waiting to be said and not being said.' That uncompromising honesty informed most of his performances with the SWR Symphony Orchestra of Baden-Baden and Freiburg, and the unmissable latest volume of SWR Music's **Michael Gielen Edition** centres on a corner of the repertory that Gielen held especially close to his heart, namely the Second Viennese School, which was also associated with the orchestra's first chief conductor, Hans Rosbaud. The 12 discs include two performances of Schoenberg's expansive symphonic poem *Pelleas und Melisande*: the first is from 1973 with the Stuttgart RSO and the second, a marginally broader account, is with the Baden-Baden orchestra in 1996 – fuller in texture than its predecessor though almost as urgent. A sombre reading of *Verklärte Nacht* from 2008 stretches to a generous 34'21", its mood emotionally candid; and there are superb performances of the two Chamber Symphonies, with No 1 additionally presented in Webern's transcription for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano, though the performance timings of both renditions are virtually identical. A compelling account of *Gurrelieder* (recorded in 2006) features Melanie Diener as Tove and Andreas Schmidt as the speaker, while *Die glückliche Hand* and *Die Jakobsleiter* hold the attention – that 'truth waiting to be said' – more than most versions that I've heard. An elderly Vox recording of Schoenberg's Violin Concerto with Wolfgang Marschner was well worth resurrecting, while the Piano Concerto is cleanly articulated by Claude Helffer (1973). There are dramatic readings of the *Five Pieces for Orchestra* and the *Variations for Orchestra* (both from 2005), and various Bach transcriptions, not to mention the bizarre String Quartet Concerto after Handel's Op 6 No 7 (2013).

As for Berg, perhaps the highlight is the Violin Concerto with Christian Ferras (1970), though there are fine versions of the Chamber Concerto (with Christoph Eschenbach and Saschko Gawriloff), *Der Wein* (Diener, 2002), *Seven Early Songs* (Diener, 2008), *Three Pieces for Orchestra*



(1993) and the Symphonic Pieces from *Lulu* (Christine Schäfer, 2007). Webern's contribution includes the *Six Pieces for Orchestra*, intensely played and ingeniously distributed among excerpts from Schubert's incidental music to *Rosamunde* (1987); and there are other orchestral works including the posthumous *Five Pieces* of 1913, the *Five Pieces*, Op 10 (both recorded 1972), the *Concerto for Nine Instruments* (1996), *Passacaglia*, the *Variations for Orchestra* (1995) and Webern's exquisite take on the *Ricercar a 6* from Bach's *The Musical Offering* (1991). Also featured are the choral works *Das Augenlicht* (1976) and Cantata No 1 (1991). Many of these recordings have never been issued before in any form, while others are making their first appearances on CD.

Shifting back to unambiguous tonality, the opening measures of **Fritz Brun's** Third Symphony (1919) recall Sibelius's Fourth from a few years earlier. It's not difficult to 'get into' Brun (1878-1959), a Swiss student of Franz Wüllner at the Cologne Conservatory: the language is tonally based, the idiom is late German Romantic and the musical ingredients of the compositions included in this (ex-Guild) collection of 'the complete orchestral works' are varied enough to sustain extended listening. Maybe the Sixth Symphony is a good place to start; indeed, any of the 10 symphonies will yield a level of enjoyment. And while most of the recordings (involving the Moscow and Bratislava symphony orchestras under the capable leadership of Adriano) are from the 21st century, there are vintage bonus tracks from 1946 featuring Adrian Aeschbacher (piano) and Paul Sacher and Brun himself conducting.

A trawl of **William Boughton** on Nimbus features, in the main, the English String and English Symphony orchestras, and isn't nearly as widely celebrated as it should be. The standard of playing is often on a par with our better-known smaller orchestras, and Nimbus's ambisonic recordings will fill your listening room

with some warmly mellifluous sounds – rarely, if ever, stinting on detail. Few of the albums represented in this collection were previously known to me, I'm ashamed to say, so as well as serving to provide an appealing sequence of music (some of it little known), it confirms Boughton's expertise as a conductor. Among the highlights are Vaughan Williams's *Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'*, Sibelius's *Suite mignonne*, Bridge's *An Irish Melody: The Londonderry Air*, Butterworth's *The Banks of Green Willow*, Parry's *From Death to Life*, music by Telemann, Boyce, JC Bach, Mendelssohn and much more. Some works are represented only as an excerpt, but still, the sequence works well. It's best to listen through without accessing the contents listing just for the pleasure of it.

Lastly this month, the celebrated Spanish flamenco guitarist and guitar-method writer **Juan Martín** is the subject of a self-selected four-disc collection, the first two CDs being devoted to pure flamenco, whereas discs 3 and 4 feature other genres (and other musicians) and include six tracks from Martín's groundbreaking flamenco-jazz rock fusion album 'Picasso Portraits' (1981; a belated 90th-birthday tribute to Picasso). This collection, which represents a dozen separate original albums, should have a very wide-ranging appeal, parading as it does some attractive repertoire brilliantly played and captured in excellent sound. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Michael Gielen Edition, Vol 8: 1954-2013

Marschner, Helffer, Diener et al
SWR Music © ⑫ SWR19063CD

Brun Complete Orchestral Works

Moscow & Bratislava SOs, Adriano et al
Brilliant Classics © ⑪ 95784

William Boughton: A Celebration on Record

English String Orch, English SO et al
Nimbus © ④ NI1712

Guitar Maestro: The Juan Martín Collection

Flamencovision © ④ FV17

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



The art of Hans Rosbaud

Every now and again one chances upon a musician whose ability to convey the elevated essence of great music promises a rewarding experience at each fresh encounter. One such is the conductor **Hans Rosbaud**, whose combination of sound musical instinct and technical prowess (Rosbaud could perform competently on virtually all of the orchestra's instruments) immediately inspires confidence. As with Toscanini, Rosbaud's performances imply a will of iron; both men led excellent radio orchestras which delivered, largely without fuss or affectation, profoundly focused interpretations. SWR's latest Rosbaud releases – with his SWR Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden – include a remarkable Brahms set where a First Symphony, as broadcast in 1955, alternates vigorous drama (in the outer movements) with a rapturously beautiful account of the *Andante sostenuto*. The fifth CD features an alternative recording of the same piece from 1960 which is significantly broader than its predecessor, though weightier textures and slower tempos in no way compromise the sense of exultant affirmation at the work's close.

One of the most notable aspects of Rosbaud's conducting is its consistency, and while two versions of Brahms's Third Symphony (1956 and 1962) again bear witness to more relaxed tempos and a proneness to darkened textures later on, the overall approach remains remarkably of a piece. The second CD is something of a miracle in that it includes a late December 1962 performance of the Second Symphony given just a little over a week before the conductor's untimely death (on December 29, at the age of 67), which for energy, clarity, warmth of feeling and a sense of excited closure compares favourably with almost any version before or since. Rosbaud's attentive ear and keen sense of musical structure, his ability to negotiate phrases that breathe unimpeded, inform a fine account of the Fourth Symphony from 1958 that has at its core a finely judged *Andante moderato* and closes with a tautly argued passacaglia. Brahms's feel-

good serenades (from 1958) come off well, both of them very well played and never rushed. The First, the lighter and longer of the two, is tellingly pointed, with an appropriately pastoral feel to it; the darker-hued, more thoughtful Second, sounds reflective and autumnal. Both piano concertos are included too, the First recorded live in 1950 with Walter Giesecking, highlights of which are a commanding opening *tutti* and Giesecking's extremely limpid and broadly paced handling of the first movement's second subject (at 6'41") – adding considerably to the work's already heightened sense of gravitas. The Second Concerto is entrusted to a pianist widely associated with the work, Géza Anda, whose colour-conscious approach on a 1958 broadcast is both suave and assertive. Mono sound quality is generally excellent throughout, and I'd count this as among the most valuable multi-CD Rosbaud collections issued so far.

The above is by no means the only example of Rosbaud to emerge from SWR. Perhaps the least expected is a coupling of Chopin's two piano concertos featuring Nikita Magaloff in the Second (1951) and Hans Richter-Haaser in the First (1961). In both cases, Rosbaud conducts the *tutti* with classical poise, imbuing the opening of the Second Concerto's *Larghetto* with a degree of prefatory tension that perfectly suits Magaloff's first entry, his playing the very essence of simplicity. For the First Concerto's opening *tutti* (just under four minutes long as performed here), Rosbaud captures a sense of occasion, whereas Richter-Haaser is attentive to both counterpoint and the lyrical slant of, say, the first movement's second subject. It's a vigorous, intelligently voiced approach to Chopin, again much aided and abetted by Rosbaud's sensitive handling of the slow movement's opening measures that usher in Richter-Haaser's poetically phrased monologue. Both concertos are treated to elegant, well-played finales. They're maybe not the last word in sophisticated or romantically inclined Chopin piano-playing on disc – perhaps more an

approach that suits the conductor's unsentimental handling of both scores.

Two further Rosbaud recordings appear in SWR's collection of chamber music and concerto recordings featuring exceptionally gifted violinist **Edith Peinemann**, who hailed from a German family of musicians (her father was a concertmaster) and was much admired by George Szell (who helped her to build a significant stack of repertoire). Peinemann's commercially recorded legacy is meagre, which makes this set especially valuable. Rosbaud's rostrum presence enhances Pfitzner's impassioned, highly original, even occasionally angry Violin Concerto (witness the beginning of the finale) and Bartók's Second, both works suggesting a sense of musical conversation: you really do feel that everyone involved has half an ear on what the rest of the orchestra is up to. Perhaps even more remarkable is the Sibelius Concerto under Ernest Bour, a performance of uncompromising darkness mostly due to Bour's pitch-black handling of the orchestral score. Also included are a mostly buoyant account of Dvořák's Concerto under Hans Müller-Kray (lovely playing of the finale's second subject) and various sonatas and solo works, most memorably Schumann's Sonata No 1 and Suk's Four Pieces. All in all, it's a most valuable collection, the Bartók, Pfitzner and Sibelius being the highlights. The transfers from original radio tapes are excellent.

THE RECORDINGS



**'Hans Rosbaud
Conducts Brahms'**

Giesecking *pf* Anda *pf*
SWR Classic © ⑥ SWR19069CD



**'Hans Rosbaud
Conducts Chopin'**

Magaloff *pf* Richter-Haaser *pf*
SWR Classic ⑤ SWR19076CD



**'Edith Peinemann: The SWR
Studio Recordings 1952-1965'**

SWR Classic ⑧ SWR19074CD
Peinemann *vn* et al



Hans Rosbaud: an opportunity to explore a fascinating conductor in wide range of repertoire

Rosbaud: rarest recordings

There are those who associate Rosbaud more with 20th-century music, and this set gathers together important recordings of such repertoire, made in 1951-62 (mainly with the Baden-Baden orchestra), which have mostly appeared on other labels (and therefore aren't exactly 'the rarest'), but it's useful to have them available cheaply in one collection. Stravinsky's *Petrushka* is punchy, angular and at times fierce, and whereas Rosbaud's Concertgebouw recording (DG) ends with the original death scene, the Baden-Baden broadcast concludes with the thrilling concert ending. And while DG (2004 Original Masters) re-released the superb Adès label issue of Stravinsky's *Agon*, Berg's Three Orchestral Pieces and Webern's Op 6 in mono, Documents reinstates the preferable stereo versions. The Schoenberg trawl is impressive. The Op 16 and Op 31 orchestral works emerge as logically crafted; the powerful broadcast premiere of *Moses und Aron* humbles me each time I hear it, especially when I recall that Rosbaud learnt the work at just eight days' notice. *Ode to Napoleon* is dramatically declaimed (in German) by Derrik Olsen, and Jeanne Héricard negotiates the gymnastic vocal gyrations of *sprechstimme* in *Pierrot lunaire*. In both cases, the pianist is the excellent Maria Bergmann, who also partners Rosbaud in an unusually dynamic account of Bartók's Sonata for two pianos and percussion. I'm glad about the inclusion of Reger's Piano Concerto with Eduard Erdmann, a fairly monumental reading, and Elgar's Cello Concerto with an especially soulful-sounding Pierre Fournier is also memorable. Ivry Gitlis is both lyrical and

athletic in the Violin Concerto by Hindemith, whose Concerto for Orchestra is brilliantly played by the New York Philharmonic. We also have Ligeti's *Atmosphères*, Strauss's *Macbeth* and an immensely characterful Mahler Fifth with the Cologne RSO, which is so charged with fire and temperament that it makes me long for a Rosbaud Mahler box (at least five other symphonies exist under his direction).

THE RECORDING



'Milestones of a Legend: The Rarest Recordings - Hans Rosbaud'

Documents © 10 600487

More from Scarpini

Rhine Classics' second collection devoted to the potently intellectual piano virtuoso **Pietro Scarpini** ('the Rubinstein of contemporary music') crosses with Documents' Rosbaud set on the repertoire front with compelling performances of Schoenberg's *Ode to Napoleon* (in English this time, with Alvar Lidell) and *Pierrot lunaire* (with a bittersweet Magda László). Also included is an expressive and alert account of the Piano Concerto under Antonio Pedrotti. Scarpini's reading of Rachmaninov's *Corelli* Variations is the nearest thing I can imagine to a recording by the composer himself (which, as it happens, we don't have), his style similarly taut and impassioned, the level of concentration awesome. Brahms's and Prokofiev's second piano concertos (under Vittorio Gui and Dimitri Mitropoulos respectively) pay particular attention to intelligence, rhetoric

and scale, both performances facing the music's fearsome technical challenges head-on. Six Scriabin sonatas as well as some Op 11 preludes and *Prometheus* (under Piero Bellugi) demonstrate Scarpini's ability to balance form and content, while his mastery of major Romantic works sheds light on Schubert's D959 Sonata (more adventurous than austere) and Schumann's Humoreske. Works by Bach as transcribed by Scarpini and others are also included. The recordings (1950-68) range from acceptable to excellent.

THE RECORDING



Pietro Scarpini: Discovered Tapes - from Baroque to Contemporary

Rhine Classics © 12 RH010

Stereo first-timers

This set sheds fresh audio perspectives on some memorable performances. In the case of Mozart's bustling Symphony No 34 as memorably recorded by the Philharmonia Orchestra under **Rudolf Kempe** in November 1955, the stereo version was only ever issued on LP on the Capitol label. **Sir Thomas Beecham's** Haydn, which is at once both elegant and imperious, is represented by a first-ever stereo release of Symphony No 97 (1957), an especially fine transfer, clear and rich in texture. From **Harry Blech** we have two documents: the opening *Adagio* from Haydn's *Salve regina* in G minor (1954), sensitively performed and featuring the soprano April Cantelo, contralto Marjorie Thomas, tenor David Galliver and baritone Thomas Hemsley; and a most engaging version of Schubert's Third Symphony, the *Allegretto* notable for its charm and delicate pointing. The last three movements are presented in a first-ever stereo release, while the first movement is cleanly transferred in mono. Two songs from **Hans Hotter's** 1954 account of Schubert's *Winterreise* make a valuable twin-channel showing and are different takes from those included on the legendary mono release. I shan't spoil your supper by quoting various other potential stereo debutants listed at the back of the booklet that we may never see. You can peruse that for yourself at your leisure – maybe even write to FHR with your heartfelt pleas! This is yet another worthwhile initiative.

THE RECORDING



Early Stereo Recordings, Vol 2

First Hand © FHR059

Classics RECONSIDERED



Charlotte Gardner and **Richard Bratby** discuss the merits and drawbacks of the Amadeus Quartet's 1960s and '70s DG recording of Haydn's six Op 76 string quartets



Haydn

String Quartets, Op 76 (and Opp 77 & 103)

Amadeus Quartet

DG

These performances are collected from various records that the Amadeus have made during the last decade or so; the earliest (and one of the finest performances) is of the so-called *Emperor* Quartet, Op 76 No 3, and was issued as long ago as 1964. All these performances have been admired on their first appearance: RF spoke of their poise and understanding in Op 76 Nos 5 and 6, MH wrote appreciatively of Op 76

Nos 1 and 4; only SP sounded a note of qualification in reviewing Op 77. 'Yet their playing, superbly accomplished as it is, leaves a little to be desired: it's so full in tone and so richly plumped-up in all four parts that the musical line-drawing often isn't really fine enough. And then, as if conscious of this tendency to deck out the line in extra-sumptuous upholstery and anxious to compensate, they rip into the music at times with almost an excess of rhythmic vitality.' He found an earlier HMV version they made of Op 77 No 1 purer in line and the style of playing less

mannered. I quote SP's reservation as I believe it to apply elsewhere.

By and large, however, the set will give satisfaction particularly to admirers of the quartet, for it is generally well recorded with plenty of presence. Brainin's vibrato is at times a shade obtrusive (and not only his). Comparing the Amadeus and the Aeolian (Argo) in the slow movement of Op 76 No 4, the latter offer less accomplished and less beautiful playing but sound far simpler and more penetrating than the more overtly expressive response of the Amadeus. **Robert Layton (2/75)**

Charlotte Gardner I'm not going to beat around the bush here. Beyond being the string quartet's creator, Haydn was a master of invention and wit with it. Yet I'd say that it wasn't until comparatively recent times that sitting down to enjoy a recording of them has been more than a niche activity, and I'm going to put the blame for that squarely on the shoulders of recordings such as this one being held up as benchmarks. I could launch off in so many ways, but I'll begin with the Amadeus's excessive vibrato and portamenti. There's a wonderful line in that 1964 review of their *Emperor* mentioned by Robert Layton which sees Jeremy Noble exclaim, 'Oh how I wish [Norbert Brainin] would just let the music make its own points!'. He was actually referring to the Haydn's partner on that recording, Mozart's *The Hunt*, but the point holds true across the Haydns. Although slightly less so with the *Emperor*.

Richard Bratby It's interesting that you say that – back when I bought this set I was playing these quartets more often than listening to them. I wanted a 'reference' recording, and at that time I was still

youthfully snobbish about Naxos, whose cycle with the Kodály Quartet would have been a natural (and cheaper!) choice. But in the late 1980s, so recently after their disbandment, the name of the Amadeus Quartet still felt like a gold seal of quality (especially in combination with DG's yellow cartouche). I should say up front that I have no problem at all with portamento or vibrato in Haydn per se. The issue here (and it's heightened in the outer movements of *Emperor* by the excessive brightness of the recording) is that the Amadeus's sound can feel a bit one-size-fits-all; plastering over rather than opening out the music's limitless expressive possibilities.

CG I'm not averse to vibrato or rubato in Haydn either, but there's a hardness about the Amadeus's vibrato which sounds uncomfortably laboured. Then portamenti-wise, it's not that they don't give us a few lovely ones, but overall they're just not employing them imaginatively. Take No 1's final movement. The dramatic possibilities are endless here, especially coming after the

'Witches' Minuet. As a result, while Brainin's upwards leap in bar six from A to E is exquisitely pure and tender, and with only the tiniest and most elegant portamento, in this case it's actually a trick missed: compare it to the feast of sneaky leg-pulling slides the Doric Quartet give us over that entire section. Likewise, when we want a bit of unabashed romance the Amadeus don't give it to us. Listen to how straight they play *Sunrise* No 4's opening gently unfurling arching phrases, then listen to the way the Alban Berg Quartet linger over them with amorous rubato tugs.

RB I think that might be the root of the problem here – that lack of imagination. 'Prosaic', I found myself writing as I re-listened to the opening of the *Sunrise*; 'literal' I scribbled down on its reappearance later in the movement. Of all the places to play it straight! I wonder how far they were prisoners of an earlier generation's taste in quartet sound – second violinist Siegmund Nissel's wife Muriel, in her memoir of life with the Amadeus Quartet, stresses their emphasis on a 'Rolls Royce' smoothness and unanimity of



How do the Amadeus Quartet's Op 76 quartets fare nearly half a century after the first recording was made?

texture – or, perhaps, of a now obsolete attitude to Haydn as the essentially light ‘warm-up’ composer for the start of a quartet programme. In fairness, there are places where I’d say the Amadeus’s homogeneity of tone pays off: the straight down-the-line opening subject of No 6, for example. Or (better still) in the *mezza voce* hymn that opens the slow movement of No 1.

CG The Fantasia of No 6 is another. Although, hymns-wise, the profundity and depths to be plumbed in the *Emperor’s Largo* go largely unrealised; they’re trying too hard, so they never find its inner silence. They also have difficulty delivering lightness and humour. Scherzos suffer, but actually it’s there from No 1’s very opening: bright, nimble and technically superb, but also self-conscious and mannered. Thinking of being slaves to an earlier generation’s sound, could it also be that they were also bound by society itself? As in, the quartet form is up on a pedestal anyway as the pinnacle of compositional craft and expression. Add that theirs was a more formal era in

societal terms, and it meant that they simply didn’t spot it when faced with a quartet composer who was as happy to be slapstick as profound, and who thrived on surprise. Perhaps lightening up as a society in general has opened the door on Haydn’s very unique musical personality.

RB But then you read about the group’s lively disagreements, the convivial dinners at the restaurant on the Finchley Road in North London that they treated like a surrogate Viennese coffee house, and the vital sense of Viennese tradition that Brainin, Nissel and Schidlof possessed by inheritance, and Lovett by adoption, and you think: yes, all the ingredients for great Haydn! But it just isn’t there. If I might disagree with you slightly about the *Emperor’s* slow movement; that’s one place where I did feel they rose to the occasion, possibly because the first four variations are effectively accompanied solos for each player in turn. There’s a mutual regard for each other’s musicianship. I agree that there’s a certain busy-ness (to be fair, it’s in 2/2; it has to flow) that carries over from the other movements. But I’m more

bothered by their stiffness in the ‘Churchyard’ *Largo* of No 5 – surely one of the most profound slow movements in all chamber music.

CG Oh, to have been a fly on the wall of that Finchley Road restaurant. You’re right, the ingredients should just have been there. I know what you mean about the *Emperor*, but for me they’ve found more romance than reverent stillness. Compare it with what the Calidore Quartet do. Still, the fact that nostalgic Finchley Road tales are still being told at all is because they were that good, and you do hear mastery across this set. Technical superbness, obviously: they’re absolutely superglued together for No 5’s zippy finale (which – gasp – is also not devoid of humour!). But also expression: the cloaked huskiness to their sound as they open No 1’s *Adagio*, Brainin’s achingly sweet solo ascent to that high B in bar 31; and while the rubato he and Nissel give to their bar 48 solo descent in thirds might feel over the top to some, boy do they move as one.

RB There are certainly moments that show you what this cycle might have been. We’ve not touched yet on the *Fifths*, but listen to the non-melodic elements of the opening – the way the three lower players’ accompaniment figures lock so naturally onto Brainin’s melody; the voicing of the exchanges that follow, and the quiet assertiveness with which they take their turns with the opening motif. This is unmistakably a group for whom quartet playing was a common language. Of course, I say ‘cycle’, but these recordings were made in four different venues over nearly seven years. Did they ever have the chance to immerse themselves in the full richness and fantasy of these six quartets, as a set? Or was it always a Haydn here, a Haydn there: always merely the bowl of noodle soup before the hearty Tafelspitz of Beethoven, Schubert or Britten? It does sound (and feel) rather that way.

CG It does. So, to return to my opening gambit, would I give this set to anyone wishing to explore these quartets for the first time? Not on your nelly! I’d give them the Doric Quartet: an ensemble who treat these works as the glorious Goulash and Germknödel that they are.

RB A conversation is a two-way process. These are four wonderful chamber musicians, with something to say about Haydn – but for whatever reason, they don’t seem to have found time to listen to what Haydn has to say to them. **G**

Books



David Threasher welcomes a valuable volume of Mozartiana:

'Keefe's black book contains the phone numbers of many of the leading contemporary commentators on Mozart'



Nigel Simeone enjoys a weighty book on Stravinsky's American years:

'Slim combines infectious enthusiasm for his subject with a close eye for detail and the result is a book that is very hard to put down'

Mozart in Context

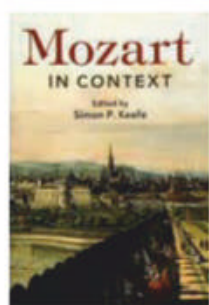
Edited by Simon P Keefe

Cambridge University Press, 350pp

£74.99 (HB), £22.99 (PB)

ISBN 978-1-107-18105-2 (HB)

ISBN 978-1-316-63244-4 (PB)



How well do we ever know the composers of the past? We know them through their music, of course,

although in many cases even this masks their personalities. Snippets of biography may illuminate stretches of their public and private life – although the variable accuracy and veracity of these can obscure and befuddle as much as they enlighten, especially as one delves further back into history. Even a character such as Bach must necessarily remain largely concealed from the 21st-century music lover, for all the enduring brilliance and popularity of his creations.

Mozart is perhaps the first great composer whose personal and musical biography can be mapped out with anything approaching completeness. This is not least thanks to the new fashion for literary biography at the cusp of the 19th century – with early such works based on the reminiscences of Mozart's surviving relatives and those who knew him. There is also the considerable goldmine of the many letters between the Mozarts, concerning not only musical matters but also more mundane, day-to-day events. Over the 19th and 20th centuries, Mozart became the first composer to have his complete works published in a scholarly edition (twice), to be the subject of a range of biographical and musicological studies (albeit of varying degrees of scientific enquiry and/or romantic wishful thinking) and to have his voluminous surviving correspondence collected, edited and translated into a range of languages.

Mozart in Context is not a birth-to-death biography but instead takes aspects of the

composer's life – musical, professional, social, geographical and so on – and assesses them in brief chapters, packed with information. The book is divided into five sections, respectively tackling Mozart's 'Personality, Work, Worldview'; the 'Towns, Cities, Countries' in which he lived, worked and composed; 'Career Contexts and Environments', addressing concepts of patronage, publishing and performance as they affected Mozart and his contemporaries; a fascinating and especially valuable segment on 'Performers and Performance', introducing the singers and players with whom Mozart worked (and his sometimes less than flattering opinions of them); and 'Reception and Legacy', assessing the responses of the ensuing centuries to the man and his music.

Simon Keefe, from his professorial chair at the University of Sheffield, is something of a one-man Mozartiana factory: his hefty *Mozart in Vienna* appeared only a couple of years ago (12/17) and he has written authoritatively on aspects of the composer including his piano concertos and the Requiem, as well as editing a string of such volumes of essays as this one. His black book contains the phone numbers of many of the leading contemporary commentators on Mozart. Thus Ulrich Leisinger writes with customary clear-sightedness on Mozart's composing methods, an area that has become overgrown with a number of hoary old myths to which Leisinger calmly takes his musicological machete. David Wyn Jones is an unparalleled guide to musical Vienna and writes not only on Mozart's involvement with his adopted city but also on his religious views, another area where clarity has long been in short supply. Bertil van Boer is the earthly representative of Mozart's exact (and similarly short-lived) contemporary Joseph Martin Kraus, and takes us through Mozart's compositional colleagues and rivals. Keefe himself writes not only on the interface between Mozart's composing and performing activities – which were not separate but symbiotic – but also on the conventions followed by

later biographers and critics. Adeline Mueller explores the phenomenon by which romanticised myths accrued to the composer even as he lay barely cold on his deathbed. Martin Harlow introduces the instrumental performers with and for whom Mozart worked during his Vienna decade, and Dorothea Link does the same for the opera singers.

There is much within – more than can be namechecked here – to delight and surprise, even for those who know and love Mozart and his music. What makes this volume so valuable is the arrangement of its information into these strands and subjects, saving the necessity to go hunting through indices of more traditional biographies. Especially in the third and fourth sections, the working musician is brought vividly to life, blasting away the popular conception of the divinely inspired composer casting off meticulous scores which were then performed by grateful musicians for appreciative audiences. It was a cut-throat world for any musician, and we encounter the practical problems of sourcing paper and ink, composing in straitened circumstances, rehearsing with perhaps difficult singers and players, negotiating with impresarios, courtiers and bureaucrats – even before the task of trying to persuade audiences to attend the performance or buy the score.

Only a few errors stuck out: the wrong date of death for Rameau (page 114); the misidentification of the violin sonatas, K10-15, as keyboard sonatas (page 135); and Rupert Ridgewell's dating of the rediscovery in Poland of a tranche of manuscripts removed from Germany during the war (page 294), which contradicts Leisinger's in his thoroughly absorbing history of the Köchel catalogue. This is an essential vade mecum that no Mozartian should be without.

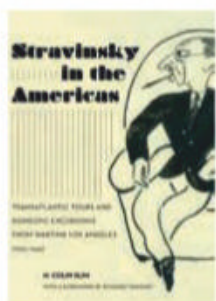
David Threasher

Stravinsky in the Americas

By H Colin Slim

California University Press, HB, 451pp, £35

ISBN 978-0-520-29992-4



This meticulously documented book sheds

new light on the first two decades of Stravinsky's association with America, from the time of his first concert tour in 1925 to the premiere of the *Symphony in Three Movements* at Carnegie Hall in January 1946. This is American Stravinsky pre-Robert Craft, and one of its most fascinating aspects is the cast of characters that emerges from the shadows – friends and associates who were often overlooked (or ignored) in Craft's numerous publications. H Colin Slim – recently turned 90 – is a distinguished Canadian scholar of Renaissance music and a Stravinsky collector who also had personal encounters with the composer. His major collection of Stravinsky material was donated to the University of British Columbia and a 358-page

Annotated Catalogue of the H Colin Slim Stravinsky Collection was published in 2002. Many items from the collection are illustrated in this new book.

Slim combines infectious enthusiasm for his subject with a close eye for detail and the result is a book that is very hard to put down. When Stravinsky first went on tour to America in 1925, his role was primarily as a composer-pianist, with only occasional conducting duties. After the US premiere of the *Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments* (Stravinsky as soloist, Mengelberg conducting, on February 5, 1925) it was dismissed by Olin Downes as having 'not an original idea', though he admitted to liking it more on a second hearing. The *Octet* fared worse, a 'lamentable' piece, by a composer who was 'precisely the opposite of a prophet of a new age'. And yet, in spite of critical hostility, Stravinsky was, as Slim demonstrates, very well looked after by the Steinway company in New York, and in Chicago his concerts were sold out. There he conducted the *Scherzo fantastique* and a suite from *The Firebird*, one critic describing these works as the product



H Colin Slim brings a wealth of detail to his account of Stravinsky's early years in America

of 'an anarchist blessed with occasional moments of sanity'. By the mid-1920s, Stravinsky was already launching regular diatribes against conductors and a decade later, when he next toured the USA, he was a much more experienced conductor of his own work. This 1935 tour was made with the violinist Samuel Dushkin. Slim argues that – in one rather disturbing sense – he was an unusual choice of musical partner for Stravinsky: one of the least attractive traits of Stravinsky's personality to emerge was his anti-Semitism. This was often concealed (and he was very fond of Dushkin personally) but this book is valuable for its exploration of an uncomfortable issue (pages 65-69). The 1935 visit was also the first time Stravinsky met film stars in Hollywood (Edward G Robinson and Charlie Chaplin), even discussing plans (quickly abandoned) for a collaboration – the first of many abortive Hollywood projects. The 1936 tour took Stravinsky to South America (conducting in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro), and the following year he was back in America giving concerts with Dushkin and renewing acquaintances

in Hollywood. The 1939-40 trip was important on several counts, including Stravinsky's teaching residency at Harvard and his marriage to Vera Soudeikina.

Part 2 of the book covers the first six years of Stravinsky's life as an American resident and, eventually, citizen. Here again Slim's fascination with little-known events in Stravinsky's career makes for compelling reading. For example, he writes about the 215 composition lessons Stravinsky gave to Earnest Andersson (1878-1943) in 1941-42, as well as Stravinsky's contribution to Andersson's *Futurama* symphony and other works. Stravinsky himself (and later Craft) spoke about *Futurama* with a characteristic mixture of half-truths and untruths ('I composed it'), but Slim provides an accurate and absorbing account of Stravinsky's most sustained activity as a composition teacher. Andersson's son-in-law, James Sample (1910-95)

was another musician with whom Stravinsky worked in 1941: as conductor of the WPA orchestra in Los Angeles, Sample gave the first performance of Stravinsky's arrangement of *The Star-Spangled Banner*. They remained friends in later years, and Slim gives a thorough account of Stravinsky's arrangement of America's National Anthem, debunking – with ample evidence and elegant reasoning – some of the more lurid myths about it (as Stephen Walsh pointed out in *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, Craft's claim that Stravinsky was arrested for playing it in Boston in 1944 turns out to be complete fiction). Other works from the 1940s to receive particular attention – and about which Slim reveals new information – include smaller works such as *Scènes de ballet*, the *Elegy* for solo viola and the *Scherzo à la Russe*, as well as the major compositions that bookend his early American years, the *Symphony in C* and *Symphony in Three Movements*.

This is not only a book to delight lovers of Stravinskian minutiae but also one that provides a richly documented study of a period in Stravinsky's life that has received relatively little attention. **Nigel Simeone**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

*Saint-Saëns's
Carnival of the Animals*

The French composer suppressed his 'zoological fantasy' but it is now among his most popular works. **Jeremy Nicholas** listens in

Is there another work in the entire classical canon quite like *The Carnival of the Animals*? The only others that come close are Saint-Saëns's own *Les odeurs de Paris*, with its parts for bagpipe, tin whistle, bird warbler, cuckoo, quail, bass drum, pistol and humming top (as well as piano, harp and trumpet); and a work cited by Saint-Saëns's biographer Brian Rees and written in the early 1850s by a certain M Saint-Léon: *Une matinée à la campagne*, 'in which his violin interpreted all manner of farmyard noises'.

The idea of writing a sequence of humorous musical sketches harked back to the early 1860s and Saint-Saëns's students at the École Niedermeyer. The creative urge is a wondrous thing, for who would have thought that he would finally be inspired to write this *jeu d'esprit* after an unsettling and unhappy tour of Germany, and while immersed in the serious business of composing his Symphony No 3, the so-called *Organ* Symphony?

Carnival was quickly written in time for the occasion for which it was intended, the annual Shrove Tuesday concert given by the then celebrated cellist Charles Joseph Lebouc (1822-93). This *Grande fantaisie zoologique* (the work's subtitle; for a 'route map' through all 14 movements, see page 121) is scored for two pianos, strings, flute (doubling piccolo), clarinet, glass harmonica and xylophone. Its first performance was chez Lebouc on March 9, 1886, with Louis Diémer and Saint-Saëns as the two pianists. A few days later, the whole work was given a second performance, this time at the Lenten concert of La Trompette, the amateur chamber music society in Paris for which

Saint-Saëns had written his Septet, Op 46, in 1881. Two hundred people had to stand, so popular was the event.

That was the last time the work was heard in public for another 35 years, though there were occasional further private performances, including a famous one shortly after the premiere given expressly for Saint-Saëns's friend Franz Liszt. Saint-Saëns, fearful that such a work would damage his reputation as a serious composer, banned any public performance until after his death. With the exception of 'The Swan', which was published in 1887, the entire score of *The Carnival of the Animals* remained in manuscript until 1921. The first performance ever given for the general public was on February 25, 1922.

A SLOW START

Though ‘The Swan’ had been recorded several times before Saint-Saëns’s death (the earliest I have come across is by the Dutch cellist Joseph Hollman in 1906), the first complete recording of *The Carnival of the Animals* seems to have been the one made in September 1929 for the Victor label by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski, with pianists Olga Barabini and Mary Binney Montgomery. I have not heard it, nor does it appear to have been transferred to CD.

I have not encountered another version between that and the one that also introduced the tradition of comic verses to the score. For this we have to thank Goddard Lieberson of Columbia Records and conductor Andre Kostelanetz (1949 – nla). Ogden Nash, then at the height of his fame as America's best-known purveyor



of humorous verse, was asked to provide something on each section; Noël Coward was booked as speaker, dubbed over or spliced into the pre-recorded music. Kostelanetz conducted the New York Philharmonic with Leonid Hambro and Jascha Zayde as the pianists, Julius Baker the flute soloist in 'Aviary' and Frank Miller the cellist in 'The Swan'. It is still probably the best-known recording of the work, one which introduced thousands of people not only to *Carnival* but to classical music.

But, frankly, this is more an entertainment using Saint-Saëns's score than a recording of *The Carnival of the Animals*. Extra bars are added to accommodate Nash's verses and Coward talks over some of the music; often the music stops and starts again for the intruder. Moreover, in 1949, Nash's verses may have tickled a funny bone. Today they sound contrived and laboured. Personally,



'The New Musical Language', a caricature from 'Les métamorphoses du jour' (1828-29) by JJ Grandville

I think they should be retired without a pension and sent to the nearest recycling plant. I can tell you, as someone who has narrated many orchestra/speaker works and been lumbered with the Nash verses more than once, modern audiences (in the UK at least) find the many dated references in the verses simply baffling. More damaging is the fact that the Nash verses are the reason why *Carnival* has been appropriated as music for children. It was never intended as such and, in any case, though children certainly love the comic elements of the score, all of the 'in' musical jokes are way above the heads of most young people.

And here I must (appropriately) confront the elephant in the room. Having written my own verses to accompany *Carnival* as an alternative to Nash's, I recorded them with the piano duo **Nettle and Markham** (who commissioned them). Using the original chamber score, it was made in 1988 but

not released due to rights issues until 2006. Innate modesty prevents me from declaring this version to be outstanding in every way, but it would equally be remiss of me to avoid mentioning it at all. While *bors de combat* in my survey, I invite you to read the online reviews of the disc in *Gramophone* and on Amazon.

ORCHESTRA WITH NARRATOR

Other Saint-Saëns-Nash recordings include that with the Boston Pops and **Arthur Fiedler**. The speaker is the honey-toned Hugh Downs, a favourite American broadcaster who, at the time of writing, is still with us at the age of 98. He reads Nash's verses as he would a local news item and, because he does not try to point up the wordplay and lame jokes, he is merely intrusive, rather than annoying *and* intrusive. At least he does not talk over or interrupt the music.

Bea Lillie was an eccentric and very funny revue artist and actress whose career both sides of the Atlantic flourished from before the First World War till the late 1960s. Her recording begins with the startling sound effect of a lion's roar – three-year olds will be terrified – and one rather hopes that similar animal noises will pepper the performance. Sadly not, but she does her best to take the curse off the Nash verses with an animated delivery, though this means her talking over some of the music and conductor **Skitch Hendersen** inserting extra bars here and there à la Kostelanetz. The two pianists are Gary Graffman and Julius Katchen, no less. Unlike most releases there are no separate tracks for each section.

If there is one point in the score where verses are a distinct hindrance to Saint-Saëns it is the final chord of 'Pianists'. This is a dominant chord that



Saint-Saëns banned performances of the work

leads directly to the first (tonic) chord of 'Fossils' but which is just left to hang in the air while the narrator speaks Nash's 'Fossils' verse. Alexander Armstrong, on a 2017 disc that includes not only *Carnival* but also *Peter and Wolf* and Rawsthorne's *Practical Cats*, is good enough despite his habit of dropping phrase endings and sounding in thrall to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and its twinkle-free conductor **Vasily Petrenko**.

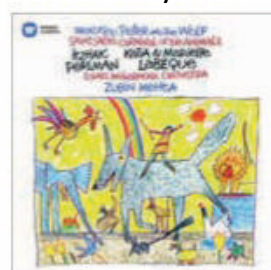
It comes as something of a surprise that the best narrator of Nash's verses is not an actor but a musician. If Itzhak Perlman does not succeed in making them laugh-out-loud-funny, he brings a childlike relish to the whimsical text. The American accent and inflections help. The Israel Philharmonic under **Zubin Mehta** give a polished account of the score (apart from a super-hysterical flute solo in 'Aviary'), with a bonus of the Labèque sisters as pianists.

SAINT-SAËNS WITH NASH

Israel PO / Zubin Mehta

Warner Classics (M) 2564 61296-0

If you insist on the Nash verses, then Perlman is your man, but the other USP



of this recording is the Labèque Sisters. Most other piano duos in this survey could take a lesson from the mischief, ease and grace that they bring.

If you want different verses to the Ogden Nash, you might be tempted to try those by the once popular presenter of BBC television's *Animal Magic*, Johnny Morris. Alas, an affinity with animals and television cameras does not a poet make. Morris's doggerel and laborious delivery spliced into an elderly-sounding Naxos recording by **Ondrej Lenárd** and the Czecho-Slovak Radio SO is best avoided.

Leonard Bernstein had a beautiful voice for the microphone before its later adenoidal decline. His take on *Carnival* is an educational one: he introduces each section with his own explanatory commentary – and very good it is too – while his soloists are all gifted youngsters. Each of them gets a namecheck, notably the young Gary Karr, who plays 'The Swan' on the double bass to enchanting effect. It's a great introduction to the score for children. But for repeated listening? No.

ORCHESTRA WITHOUT NARRATOR

There's not much fun to be had in the CBSO's account under **Louis Frémaux** with husband-and-wife pianists John Ogdon and Brenda Lucas. Everything is respectful and firmly in place, though the pianos in 'The Elephant' are far too assertive. **Seiji Ozawa** directing the Boston Symphony Orchestra is another big-name conductor who sucks the jollity out of proceedings – and if you can't get hold of a glass harmonica, at least hire a glockenspiel. Leaving it to a solo violin simply won't do. Garrick Ohlsson and John Browning are the pianists.

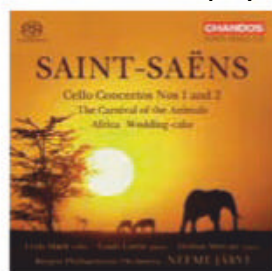
The Naxos recording with Ondrej Lenárd and the Czecho-Slovak Radio SO (see above) is the one that was later used for the Johnny Morris verses. The absence of a narrator in the disc's earlier incarnation is still no reason to buy it (despite my narration of *Peter and the Wolf* on the same CD). The band under **Stanislav Gorkovenko** should have been allowed a retake of the first 12 bars in order to get the ensemble together. There's also a fluffed note in bar 45. 'Fossils' is lively enough but the xylophone player is

BEST WITH ORCHESTRA

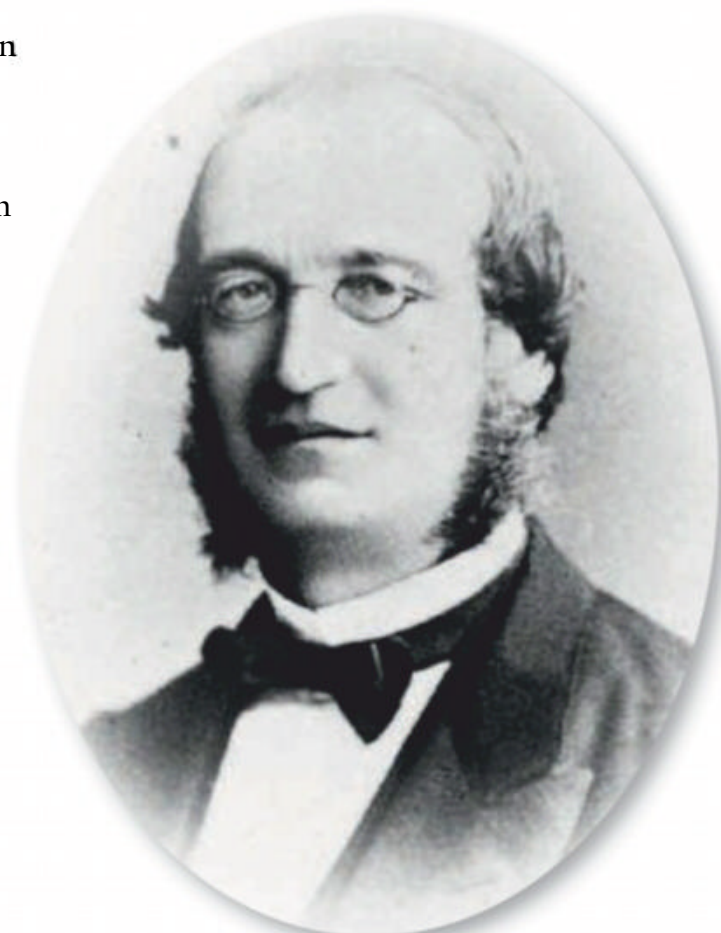
Bergen PO / Neeme Järvi

Chandos (F) CHSA5162

Lortie and Mercier are hilariously bad in 'Pianists', the xylophone soloist in 'Fossils'



is relentless and Truls Mørk provides a serene and regal 'Swan', free of cloying sentimentality. The cherry on top is an actual glass harmonica in 'Aquarium'.



Charles Joseph Lebouc hosted the 1886 premiere

banished to the rear of the hall. The disc also has the only available recording of *Peter and the Wolf* without narrator.

Surprisingly, the version by **Antonio Pappano** (pianist/conductor) and Martha Argerich does not start promisingly, with the glissando in bar 11 of the Introduction not terribly well executed and an edit that kills the reverb dead in bar 12. Small points, and thereafter there is much to savour with excellent 'Hens and Cockerels', an outstanding flute solo in 'Aviary' and the two protagonists in 'Pianists' enjoying being terrible.

One curiosity is the clever arrangement by **John Morris Russell**, which manages by means of sheer chutzpah and pizzazz to convey the spirit of the original without the use of two pianos. Only the Cininnati Pops, perhaps, could get away with it and leave you smiling. Russell conducts his own arrangement (omitting the 'Pianists' movement, of course) and a handful of other enticing works for children.

But in terms of modern or vintage recordings of the orchestral score *sans*

THREE FRENCH MASTERPIECES

LSO / Barry Wordsworth

LSO Live (S) LSO1157

The two pianists are simply outstanding and Wordsworth ekes out every bit of humour



from his players. Rather than couple it with the inevitable *Peter and the Wolf*, he adds Bizet's *Jeux d'enfants* and Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite*.



For Chandos: Järvi, Truls Mørk, Hélène Mercier and Louis Lortie; Alasdair Malloy and his glass harmonica

narrator, there is a clear winner: **Neeme Järvi** leading the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra with Louis Lortie and Hélène Mercier as his pianists. As I remarked when welcoming the disc in the January 2016 issue, everything about this performance and its conception is beyond praise with the exception of 'The Elephant', in which Piano 2 is overbearing and the basses under-pompous. All of Saint-Saëns's tempos are acutely observed. Note, for example, the flute solo in 'Aviary', played *Moderato grazioso* as marked and not (as nearly always) *allegro molto*.

CHAMBER ORIGINAL

Barry Wordsworth conducts a pared-down LSO, ticking all the boxes from start to finish. The players have obviously been told to let their hair down in the outright comedic sections like 'Kangaroos' and 'Persons with Long Ears'. 'Wild Asses' (marked *Presto furioso*) so often emerges as a gabble; here and in the finale 'reprise', you hear every note at a ferocious speed.

I like the way **Philip Ellis** and the Philharmonia build the Introduction's intensity to the opening glissando, and also the Lion's steady, dignified pace (Nicholas Walker and Laura O'Gorman are the excellent pianists). Criticisms? 'The Elephant' is far too fast, the glockenspiel in 'Aquarium' is disappointing and the xylophone is too backwardly placed in 'Fossils'. This disc, however, has the benefit of avuncular Peter Ustinov narrating *Peter and the Wolf*, rounded off with a sparkling take on Leopold Mozart's *Toy Symphony*.

Martha Argerich's chamber version with friends **Nelson Freire**, Mischa Maisky, Gidon Kremer and others is preferable

to that with Pappano. The 'Aviary' (with glockenspiel) is well done, 'Fossils' sounds properly daft and Maisky gives us a most touching 'Swan'. Only the 'Cuckoo' (a jokey straight-faced clarinet) is spoilt by the pianists' intrusive accents way above Saint-Saëns's *sempre pp* request. There is no narration for *Carnival* but there is for the three other pieces on the disc – two by Alan Ridout with English texts, a third by Frieder Meschwitz in German. Unaccountably, violinist Gidon Kremer takes on the role of speaker. His acting skills and barely comprehensible English pronunciation



are toe-curling. However, this *Carnival* is available without the three other works in a superb DG box-set devoted to Saint-Saëns.

Philippe Entremont and **Gaby Casadesus** are disappointingly poker-faced in a fine

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1960 LSO / Henderson (Beatrice Lillie narr)	Decca Eloquence (M) ELQ466 6732 (10/60 ^R)
1961 Boston Pops Orch / Fiedler (Hugh Downs narr)	RCA (M) D 09026 68131-2 (12/95)
1962 New York PO / Bernstein (Leonard Bernstein narr)	Sony Classical (M) D SMK60175 (3/99)
1971 CBSO / Frémaux	CfP/Warner (B) 382233-2
1976/77 Béoff & Collard et al	EMI/Warner Classics (B) 602316-2
1978 Entremont & Casadesus et al	Sony Classical (M) D SBK47655 (3/79 ^R)
1982/83 Israel PO / Mehta (Itzhak Perlman narr)	Warner Classics (M) 2564 61296-0 (12/84 ^R)
1985 Argerich & Freire et al	Philips (F) 416 841-2PH; DG (B) 2 469 310-2GP2
1988 Nash Ens	Virgin/Erato (M) D 2435 61516-5
1988 Nettle & Markham (Jeremy Nicholas narr)	Netmark (M) NEMACD600 (4/08)
1989 Philh Orch / Ellis	Resonance (M) D CDRSN3027
1989 LSO / Wordsworth	LSO Live (S) D LSO1157
1990 Czecho-Slovak RSO / Lenárd	Naxos (B) 8 550335 or 8 550499
1990 Czecho-Slovak RSO / Lenárd (Johnny Morris narr)	Naxos (B) 8 554463 (2/99)
1994 St Petersburg Rad & TV Orch / Gorkovenko	Sony Masterworks (M) D QK57234
1994 Boston SO / Ozawa	RCA (M) D 07464 64079-2
2003 Braley & Dalberto et al	Virgin/Erato (F) 545603-2 (1/04)
2013 Cincinnati Pops Orch / JM Russell	Fanfare Cincinnati (F) FC004
2015 Bergen PO / N Järvi	Chandos (F) CHSA5162 (1/16)
2016 RCO / Denève	DG (M) D 481 5072
2016 S Cecilia Orch / Pappano	Warner Classics (F) 9029 57555-5 (12/17)
2017 RLPO / V Petrenko (Alexander Armstrong narr)	Warner Classics (F) 9029 57595-2 (11/17)

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chamber-ensemble recording from 1980 which also features Yan-Pascal Tortelier as one of the violinists and Yo-Yo Ma on cello. Each movement follows the other *attaca*. 'The Elephant' has a jaunty spring in its step and 'Cuckoo' is played as a haunting tone poem. A pity it is now coupled with a so-so account of the Third Symphony under Ormandy from 1963.

Siblings Arthur and Lucas Jussen have absolutely no fun at all in their polite and accurate rendering of the score with (members of) the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under **Stéphane Denève**. It is extremely well recorded – but what a gloomy entertainment this is, with only the double bass in 'The Elephant' rising to the occasion. The **Nash Ensemble**, too, are rather disappointingly a smile-free zone and have to be passed over despite a marvellously atmospheric 'Cuckoo'. This is for those who see *Carnival* as a clever series of tone poems rather than a divertissement.

But enough. First and second prizes go to two recordings that both (coincidentally?) feature French soloists. **Michel Béroff** and **Jean-Philippe Collard** are my runners-up, sharing nearly all the qualities of the winners. First, they follow Saint-Saëns's markings to the letter and then bring their own personalities to the score. The clarity of the parts is wonderfully captured throughout in readings that are witty and affectionate by turns. You would think that the role of the ass in 'Persons with Long Ears' would be a gift to any fiddle player;

FOLLOWING THE CARNIVAL

Here, briefly, is the route map of *The Carnival of the Animals*, with the French/English titles of each section, and some notes on some of the internal musical references.

- 1 Introduction et Marche royale du Lion** ('Introduction and the Lion's Royal March') – with perhaps a nod and a wink to his song 'La brise' (the first of *Mémoires persanes*, Op 26) dedicated to Pauline Viardot.
- 2 Poules et coqs** ('Hens and Cockerels') – see also Rameau, one of Saint-Saëns's favourite composers.
- 3 Hémiones** (usually translated as 'Wild Asses') – the original title was 'Animaux véloces', now the movement's subtitle. 'Hémiones' are 'onagers', says the dictionary unhelpfully, though there is, apparently, a subspecies called a Persian onager (see *Mémoires persanes*, above) while a 'dziggetai' (also seen in some translations) is a Mongolian wild ass, another sub-species of the onager.
- 4 Tortues** ('Tortoises') – quotes 'La, la, la, la, la, parton, marchons' and 'Ce bal est original, d'un galop infernal' from *Orpheus in the*

Underworld by Offenbach, played very, very slowly.

- 5 L'Éléphant** ('The Elephant') – 'Danse des Sylphes' from Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*, with a dash of the Scherzo from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- 6 Kangourous** ('Kangaroos').
- 7 Aquarium** ('Aquarium').
- 8 Personages à longues oreilles** ('Long-eared persons'). Saint-Saëns's braying asses are possibly a reference to certain music critics.
- 9 Le coucou au fond des bois** ('The Cuckoo in the Depths of the Forest').
- 10 Volière** ('Aviary').
- 11 Pianistes** ('Pianists') labouring over their Hanon and Czerny studies.
- 12 Fossiles** ('Fossils') – a potpourri of Saint-Saëns's own *Danse macabre*, then 'J'ai du bon tabac', 'Ah! Vous dirai-je maman', 'Au clair de la lune', 'Partant pour la Syrie', and 'Una poco voce fa' from *The Barber of Seville*.
- 13 Le Cygne** ('The Swan').
- 14 Final** ('Finale') – a medley of what has gone before.

both my final two recordings share the Palme d'Or for the gloomiest Eeyores on disc (brilliant). The clarinet presents a far distant cuckoo, playing (as the composer asks) 'dans la coulisse' ('behind the scenes' or 'offstage') to utterly magical effect.

But my top choice is the ensemble including Renaud and Gautier Capuçon,

pianists **Frank Braley** and **Michel Dalberto** and flautist Emmanuel Pahud. The latter plays the 'Aviary' solo better than on any other recording (yes, above the tempo marking but with what nonchalance and character, the final chromatic scale ascending to an incredible *ppp* as written). 'The Swan' in Gautier Capuçon's hands made me well up – that's all I can say. There are many other felicitous moments and individual contributions; but what nudges this account just ahead of Béroff and Collard is the lighter touch in every number. Despite the presence of that sullen audience of one, the microphone, everyone is having – if you'll pardon the expression in this context – a whale of a time. **G**

TOP DOG

Frank Braley, Michel Dalberto et al
Erato © 545603-2

Here is the score as originally envisaged by the composer, played by a group of sophisticated and supremely talented friends in party mood. I hope the performance that the ageing Liszt heard was as good as this, though I doubt it. Boasting the most



eye-catching CD cover of all, this *Carnival* is coupled with the Septet (another work written for La Trompette) and additional Saint-Saëns chamber pieces.



Gautier Capuçon and Frank Braley who, with some talented friends, produce winning results for Erato

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

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Teatro Comunale, Bolzano & online

September 6

Sitting within the South Tyrolean Bolzano Festival Bozen, the Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition includes Martha Argerich and Alfred Brendel among its previous laureates. Late in August, 27 pianists arrived to battle it out for prizes including a first of €22,000. September 6 is then Grande Finale night. Live-streamed, the evening sees the three remaining candidates perform with the Haydn Orchestra.

concorsobusoni.it, facebook.com/Busoni.Piano.Competition, youtube.com/user/BusoniInternational/

Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg & online

September 6

This month sees **Alan Gilbert** officially step into his new role as Chief Conductor of the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra. On the menu are Symphony No 1 of Hamburg native Brahms, the world premiere of *Frontispiz für Orchester* by the NDR's 2019-20 Composer-in-Residence, Unsuk Chin, then three 20th-century works from Gilbert's homeland: Bernstein's *Jeremiah* Symphony, Ives's *The Unanswered Question* and Varèse's *Amérique*. Catch it on one of three streaming platforms.

elbphilharmonie.de, facebook.com/elbphilharmonie.hamburg/, ndr.de/eo

Wigmore Hall, London & online

September 9, 11, 14, 15

It's a busy month for Wigmore Hall, beginning with its biennial **Independent Opera International Song Competition**. Open to singers and pianists of all nationalities who are keen to embark on significant recital careers. You can catch both the semi-finals and finals streamed live on the hall's website. Then just a few days later comes its **Beethoven Festival Weekend**, which marks the start of Beethoven 250, the hall's season-long celebration of the composer in honour of his 2020 anniversary year. All the opening weekend concerts will be live streamed and then available on demand in perpetuity via the hall's streaming service, and the weekend opens with **Steven Isserlis** and **Robert Levin** (on fortepiano) playing all of Beethoven's cello sonatas. The violin sonatas are also presented on the Saturday, by **Alina Ibragimova** and **Cedric Tiberghien**. Sunday's offerings include Beethoven works conceived for unusual combinations of instruments, featuring artists including oboist **Nicholas Daniel**, viola-player **Timothy Ridout**, double bassist **Chi-chi Nwanoku** and flautist **Janne Thomson**, while punctuating the entire weekend will be five themed concerts from **O/Modernt** chamber ensemble directed from the violin by **Hugo Ticciati**, joined by guest artists including fortepianist **Kristian Bezuidenhout**, violinist **Carolyn Widmann** and

the **Škampa Quartet**. The weekend closes with a late night recital of Beethoven's three final piano sonatas from renowned interpreter **Elisabeth Leonskaja**.

wigmore-hall.org.uk/song-competition, wigmore-hall.org.uk/watch-listen/live-stream

Konzerthaus, Dortmund & Takt1

September 18

This Takt1 broadcast sees cellist **Sol Gabetta** take to the stage in Dortmund for the first time in nine years, performing Saint-Saëns's Cello Concerto No 1 with **Daniele Gatti** guest conducting the Staatskapelle Dresden, with whom Gabetta is Artist in Residence. Also on the programme is Mahler's Fifth.

konzerthaus-dortmund.de, takt1.com

Prinzregententheater, Munich & online

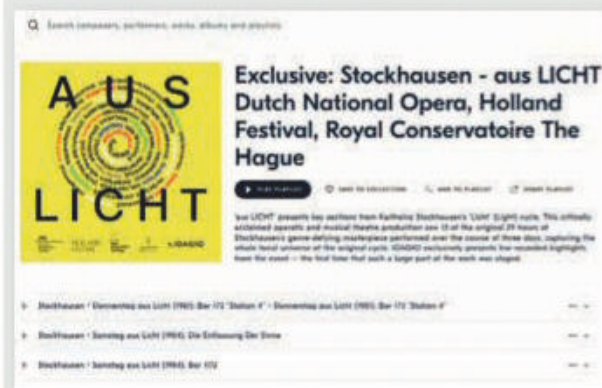
September 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

Based in Munich, the ARD is Germany's largest classical music competition, with a constantly rotating set of disciplines. Each category's prizes are topped by a €10,000 First Prize, but honestly the real top prize is its career-launching potential: when Quatuor Ébène won in 2004 they went from 10 concerts a year to 130 overnight. The orchestras supporting the musicians in the live-streamed semifinals, finals and prizewinners' concerts are the **Munich CO**, the **BRSO** and the **Munich Radio Orchestra**.

bc.de/ard-musikwettbewerb

ARCHIVE OPERA REVIEW

What, no helicopters? An audio guide to Stockhausen's *Licht*, from Amsterdam - courtesy of idagio.com



Stockhausen

In June this year, Dutch opera-goers joined Stockhausen enthusiasts from around the world in a former gas-holder-turned nightclub on the western edge of Amsterdam. Over three days they (we) were dazzled, puzzled and bewitched by almost half (about 15 of the 29 hours) of *Licht*, the seven-day opera cycle that stages life, the universe

and everything through the eyes of Karlheinz Stockhausen.

The Idagio platform presents a CD-length plate of canapes to the full tasting menu that is *Licht*. None too helpfully labelled, they begin by pitching us into the middle of 'Michael's Journey around the World', the virtuosic concerto conceived for the composer's trumpet-playing son and enacting his own well-travelled path to fame in the '60s.

Subsequent highlights include the shattering climax of 'Lucifer's Dance' – in the concert version without the composed-in ending where the musicians go on strike – and the orchestral 'Invasion' from *Tuesday*, which really has to be seen to be believed, with battalions of rival brass players doing battle around a Last-Post *Pietà* solo for a fallen young

trumpeter (Michael/Stockhausen/Jesus again).

Three well-chosen excerpts from *Monday* focus on the cycle's third character, Eva: her gentle education of her (very musical) children, her disturbing corruption of them and then the magical abduction scene, in which a Pied Piper leads them away to music of a chilling, unearthly beauty. Free-jazz piano, swirling electronica, big-band carousing, a cappella hymns and debates (in the 'World Parliament' from *Wednesday*); they're all here, and in superbly prepared performances by (mostly) Dutch-conservatoire students. Even without the visuals, it's a feast for the senses. **Peter Quantrill**

Available as part of a subscription (or using the 14-day free trial) at idagio.com/playlists/aus-licht

The Grange Festival's production of *Agrippina*, with the Academy of Ancient Music in the pit, strikes gold



Handel

Agrippina is everywhere at the moment. The Bavarian State Opera's production arrives at Covent Garden this autumn, and a different production from the New York Met is coming to a cinema near you on February 29 next year. It's a witty opera from Handel's early years in Italy that satirises the goings-on at the court

of the Emperor Claudius in ancient Rome, and Walter Sutcliffe's modern-dress production from the Grange Festival does it full justice. The revolving set by Jon Bausor consists of raked rows of theatre seats that become a flight of steps leading, half-way into Act 2, to a garden. Its latter configuration enables the characters to hide, eavesdrop and appear as if from nowhere – all beautifully handled by Sutcliffe.

Three characters are familiar, operatically speaking, from Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, but the librettist's treatment of two of them is quite different. In this production Nerone is vain, with a foot fetish and an unhealthy intimacy with his mother. Poppea, whom Nerone is pursuing, is a

sexy minx in a short skirt – and just admire Stefanie True as she puts her hair up while singing 'Vaghe perle'. The only serious one of the three is the much put-upon Ottone, his noble lament supported by the intensity of the strings. Claudio, in red trousers that he loses while trying to seduce Poppea, is a figure of fun. His wife Agrippina, who spends the opera trying to instal her son Nerone on the throne, is brilliantly taken by Anna Bonitatibus. Excellent singing all round, and with several cuts and abridgements the action proceeds swiftly. Excellent playing, too, by the AAM under Robert Howarth. English subtitles. **Richard Lawrence**

Available to view free of charge until December 11 at operavision.eu

Tsinandali Estate, Georgia & medici.tv
September 8-22

A major new 15-day international festival run by the Verbier Festival team, the **Tsinandali Festival** will from henceforth be running each September on the historic Tsinandali Estate – Georgia's most visited tourist attraction – with two purpose built concert spaces constructed in its honour: a 1200-seater open-air amphitheatre with a retractable roof, and a 600-seat Chamber Concert Hall. It will be presenting major international artists, and also a specially formed **Pan Caucasian Youth Orchestra** under the direction of **Gianandrea Noseda**, which brings together more than 80 musicians from the surrounding region. Other artists include **Fazil Say** and **Yuja Wang**, and 17 of these concerts are being live streamed. tsinandalifestival.ge, medici.tv

Polish National Opera Warsaw & OperaEuropa
September 20

Poznan Opera revives Pawel Passini's 2015 staging of Stanisław Moniuszko's 1858 pillar of the Polish operatic repertory, *Halka* (with English subtitles), under the baton of its Artistic Director, **Gabriel Chmura**. **Magdalena Nowacka** takes the title-role of the naive young peasant girl who enters into a disastrous romance with a callous member of the nobility. **Piotr Friebe** sings Jontek and **Łukasz Goliński** sings Janusz. operavision.eu

L'Opéra Garnier, Paris & medici.tv
September 24

This live-streamed new production of Verdi's *La traviata* for Paris Opéra sees Simon Stone make his directorial debut for the company.

Michelle Matiotti conducts a cast headed by **Pretty Yende** as Violetta and **Benjamin Bernheim** as Alfredo. operadeparis.fr, medici.tv

Gothenburg Concert Hall & online GSO Play
September 24, October 4

The first of this month's two live-streamed concerts from the Gothenburg Symphony is conducted by its Chief Conductor **Santtu-Matias Rouvali**. It was for Sibelius's Symphony No 1 and *En Saga* that he and the GSO were shortlisted for this year's *Gramophone* Awards, we're especially happy to see this programme open with more Sibelius, in the form of the symphonic fantasy *Pohjola's Daughter*. The programme includes Lindberg's *Accused* (with soprano Anu Komsil) and Nielsen's Symphony No 4, *The Inextinguishable*. The second concert meanwhile presents a musically diverse offering directed by **Barbara Hannigan**. Debussy's *Syrinx* opens this one, with the orchestra's lead flautist Håvard Lysebo. Then come Sibelius's *Luonnotar* with Hannigan as soloist, Haydn's Symphony No 96, *The Miracle*, Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* and Gershwin's *Girl Crazy* suite. gso.se

Prague National Theatre, OperaVision VoD
September 27

Not a live stream, but still the first time the overwhelming majority of readers will have had an opportunity to experience *Sternenhoch*, Ivan Acher and Michal Dočekal's highly successful 2018 operatic and dance adaptation of Ladislav Klíma's 1928 Expressionist novel, *The Sufferings of Prince Sternenhoch*. OperaVision offers the first on-demand appearance of a performance

captured during its April 2018 run. The cast, into which five dancers also weave in and out, is headed by **Sergiy Kostov** in the title-role. Expect highly visual staging, and music which is mostly electronic bar the presence of contrabassoon and zither. Sung in Esperanto with Czech and English surtitles. narodni-divadlo.cz/en, operavision.eu

Orchestra Hall, Detroit
October 6, 18

The first of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's two live streamed performances this month sees them under the guest conducting baton of **Michael Francis**, in the same programme that the attendees of the first DSO concert in Orchestra Hall heard 100 years ago to the day, and it's a powerhouse one: Weber's *Oberon* Overture, Beethoven's Fifth, Mozart's Concerto for Two Pianos with soloists **Christina** and **Michelle Naughton**, and Bach's Concerto No 2 for Three Pianos for which the Naughton sisters are joined by **David Fung**. The second concert then presents Mahler's Symphony No 4 guest-conducted by **Jader Bignamini** with soprano **Janai Brugger**, preceded by Glinka's Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, and Bruch's Violin Concerto with **Yooshin Song**. dso.org

medici.tv

October 16, 6.30pm (GMT)

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Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

OCTOBER TEST DISCS



Soprano Melody Moore presents an alluring collection of American song styles, gorgeously recorded and available in DSD64 and multichannel.



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Coming full-circle by following audio trends

Naim is the latest company to reincorporate a phono stage in its amplifiers, offering listeners more choice

Unexpected but in many ways inevitable: that was the initial reaction to the news that Naim's latest amplifiers now offer a built-in phono stage for use with a record player. After all, the company's flagship integrated amplifier, the Supernait, has now come full-circle. The original had an array of digital inputs in addition to its analogue connections; the Supernait 2 dropped the digital provision and now the Supernait 3 **1**, selling for £3499, remains all-analogue but with the addition of a moving-magnet phono stage of in-house design.

The three-stage phono section – gain, passive equalisation and final gain and active equalisation – is built for excellent noise performance, extended RIAA equalisation (with a low frequency curve between the traditional and the IEC standard) and increased overload headroom, and uses 'through-hole' mounted equalisation capacitors for better sound quality. A larger toroidal transformer is used and the second gain-stage transistors have far greater power handling, meaning a level of protection could be removed, doubling the slew rate and reducing group delay. Power transistors are mounted on ceramic insulators, as in Naim's flagship power amps, and the pre-amp section uses a selected ALPS Blue Velvet volume potentiometer and reed relay input selection. A dedicated Class A headphone stage is also fitted.

The Nait XS3 **2** sells for £2199; but step up to the Supernait 3 and, as well as more output power, you gain Naim's 24V Discrete Regulator power supply for the

pre-amp, more through-hole components in the signal path and input sockets hand-wired to the circuit board to reduce vibration. There's also a balance control, and both amplifiers can be upgraded with the addition of Naim's offboard power supplies.

New from AudioQuest is the latest version of its DragonFly 'DAC in a USB stick': the Cobalt model sits above the existing Black and Red versions, and sells for £269 **3**. Like the Red, it has a 2.1V output to drive headphones or the line-ins on amplifiers, a bit-perfect digital volume control and compatibility with Apple and Android devices, as well as MQA files, but it also features significant upgrades. An upgraded ESS DAC chip is used, along with a faster, lower-power processor; there's better immunity to wireless interference from the likes of Wi-Fi and Bluetooth; and a new DragonTail adaptor is supplied with USB-C connectivity.

Also featuring an improved DAC is the rather larger McIntosh C53 pre-amplifier, which sells for £9995 **4**. It uses the company's new – and upgradable – DA2 module, which offers seven inputs including USB with up to DSD512 and PCM 384kHz file compatibility, and has an HDMI ARC input for the connection of TV sound, also allowing the TV remote handset to control the pre-amp. There are also nine analogue inputs, including MM/MC phono, three sets of analogue

pre-outs, an onboard eight-band equaliser and the company's High Drive headphone amplifier. Home Theatre passthrough is also included, and the pre-amp has extensive custom installation connectivity.

US-based company Kimber Kable is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year and launching a new range of digital interconnects. Kimber Select USB cables **5** are available in copper, copper/silver hybrid and pure silver versions, and feature advanced shielding to keep the 5V power lines apart from the data transmission. USB-Copper uses copper-plated silver for the data, insulated with PTFE and shielded with a foil connected directly to the plugs, with copper for the power lines, while the USB-Hybrid uses pure silver for the data lines and USB-Silver for both data and power. The cables are available in lengths from 0.5m to 6m, with a choice of USB plug types. Prices start from £562.50.

Finally, the Pro-Ject X Series turntables are now available in the UK **6**, replacing the previous 1 Xpression Carbon and 2 Xperience SB models. The X1, selling for £699 complete with a fitted Pick-IT S2 MM cartridge made by Ortofon, is the latest development of the company's original turntable design and features new motor isolation, a carbon/aluminum one-piece tonearm and an electronic speed controller. The £999 X2 has a more substantial build, a one-piece tonearm derived from the company's Classic turntable and a choice of black or white satin, black gloss or walnut veneer finishes, and comes complete with an Ortofon 2M Silver cartridge. Both models can also be bought without cartridge for £100 less. **G**



● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Hegel H390

Simple-looking amplifier proves to be a highly capable network streaming hub, as well as having the power to drive almost any speakers

Maybe it's because it's based in Norway, or maybe it's because it distributes directly to UK retailers from its headquarters, but Hegel Audio Systems seems to be off the radar of many hi-fi buyers. That's a pity, because the Oslo-based company has a highly appealing range of products, including amplifiers from the £1500 H90 all the way through to the £9000 Reference H590, along with pre-amps, power amps, CD players, DACs and more.

All are characterised by no-frills design in which front panels are kept simple, build is solid and the audio engineering impeccable, and the sound follows one very simple rule: the company aims to change what's coming into the amplifiers at the inputs as little as possible before it reaches the speaker output. In other words, it's a 'do no harm' philosophy, in which the only difference between in and out is a matter of scale.

That idea of scale applies to the styling of the company's products, too. The four amplifiers in the -90 series look very similar, with just the size increasing. So the H90 stands a slimline 8cm tall, the top-end H590 is an AV receiver-size 17.1cm tall and the H390 we have here is 14.5cm. Selling for £4900, the H390 replaces the brand's H360 amplifier and is just a little over half the price of the H590. And with Hegel's typical Nordic sense of humour, while the top-end model was nicknamed 'Master and Commander', this one became 'Robin Hood', because 'it takes so much from the reference H590 and gives to the "poor"'. Well, the better part of £5000 may be an interesting definition of poor and places



HEGEL H390

Type Integrated amplifier

Price £4900

Power 250W per channel into 8 ohms

Analogue inputs One balanced on XLRs, two single-ended on RCA

Digital inputs Two coaxial, three optical,

USB Type B, network on Ethernet

Analogue outputs One pair of speakers, fixed and variable line

Digital output Coaxial

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43x14.5x44cm

hegel.com

the H390 right on the edge of the price range we tend to cover in these pages, but there's method in our apparent madness here. First, this is rather more than the simple amplifier it seems at first glance over its minimal two-control fascia; and second, despite the huge price differential, the performance here is sufficiently close to that of the flagship model that for most potential purchasers this will be by far the most logical buy. Having let that cat out of the bag relatively early in this review, let's take a step back and see what the H390 is all about, looking behind those simple lines to see just what it can do.

At the simplest level, this is an amplifier with a relatively hefty 250W-per-channel

output from its SoundEngine 2 dual mono power section, which constantly monitors itself to maintain signal purity. It has analogue inputs on one set of balanced XLRs and two sets of single-ended RCA sockets, and five digital inputs – three optical and one coaxial each on a single RCA and a BNC socket. In addition to its speaker outputs, the amplifier also has a single digital output, one pair of fixed-level analogue outputs and variable-level analogue outs to feed an external power amp or a subwoofer.

So far so usual – as, these days, is the provision of an asynchronous USB Type B input to allow the H390 to be connected directly to a computer for high-resolution

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music, this connection allowing it to handle files up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD256. The other digital inputs will support up to 192kHz/24-bit and DSD64, using the DSD over PCM frames (DoP) protocol. All digital inputs also support MQA encoding, thanks to their being passed through the amplifier's digital signal processing.

When using the USB input, it's also possible to enable what Hegel calls 'USB volume'. This means the amplifier's high-precision volume control is operated by the connected USB device, with much better results than a truncated digital-volume-controlled signal being passed to the H390. In another twist, the digital section doesn't follow the current trend of upconverting and upsampling digital signals to the maximum capability of the onboard digital-to-analogue converter. Instead the system 'down-clocks' to match the sampling rate of the incoming signal, thus reducing noise.

The Hegel takes on the greatest challenges a work can throw at it and delivers the music with admirable transparency and conviction

We're not done yet on the digital section, as the H390 also has an Ethernet port and thus can stream content over a home network using UPnP/DLNA – the standard streaming protocols – Apple AirPlay or Roon. The last of these, to be available via a forthcoming software update, will also open up Qobuz and Tidal streaming (subject to subscription), adding these to the Spotify Connect the amplifier already supports. There's no dedicated control app for the amplifier, the company suggesting the use of the free Bubble UPnP app, but it will also work with other third-party apps such as Linn's Kinsky.

A conventional remote control handset is provided with the H390, while the menu system allows various parameters to be set up, including unity-gain passthrough (should you wish to use the amp in tandem with an AV receiver or processor), start-up, maximum volume and so on. If the amp is connected to the home network, you can also read

its network address from the menu system, then use this in a browser window on a computer on the same network to access on-screen set-up.

It's also possible to update the amplifier's firmware using just the remote control, at least provided the H390 is connected to the internet via the network port. As with all these kinds of product these days, that's an intrinsic part of setting up for review and something to check from time to time.

PERFORMANCE

Using the H390 is simple – or at least as simple or as complex as you want to make it. Indeed, you could use it purely as an analogue input amplifier, controlling it via the neat handset supplied, and never even be aware of all the other facilities it offers. However, that would be missing the point, as so much is crammed into this single box of remarkable style and quality.

Even better than the full array of listening possibilities on offer here is that the Hegel handles all its 'inputs' equally well, with a sound that's full and mature, yet with excellent detail and resolution, and truly massive dynamics when required. The amplifier is fast and deft with everything from solo piano or violin to the wonderfully vibrant live recording of Mahler's Third Symphony by the Gürzenich-Orchester Köln under François-Xavier Roth (4/19), originally a live stream but captured for posterity by Harmonia Mundi in 48kHz/24-bit sound. The freshness of both recording and performance is captivating, and the power of the Hegel conveys the drama superbly.

What's remarkable about this amplifier is the way it grips and controls any speakers you choose to drive with it but does so without any sense of restraint or the output approaching its limits – the Hegel just takes on the greatest challenges a work can throw at it and delivers the music with admirable transparency and conviction. It's definitely one of those hi-fi components that just sounds right, as well as offering the listener new insights into familiar recordings.

For all the capability inside that sleek, substantial casework, there's nothing mechanical or technical about the H390's sound. Instead, there's just a compellingly organic flow of music that's hard to resist. **G**

Or you could try ...

There's not exactly a shortage of big, powerful amplifiers offering both digital and analogue inputs.

Rotel RA-1572



A model such as the Rotel RA-1572 offers a lower-price alternative to the Hegel, though it lacks the streaming capabilities. It does have a USB Type B input for a computer, however, and a healthy 120W-per-channel output. See rotel.com for more details.

Krell K-300i



Step up beyond the Hegel to an amplifier from a famous name from the USA, and the Krell K-300i is available either with or without a built-in streaming module, which brings it in line with the Hegel's capabilities. Even slimmer than the H390, it nonetheless delivers 150W per channel, and is both simple to use and capable of striking performance. For more, see krellonline.com.

Mark Levinson No5805



Finally, another US brand has a striking new contender in this market. The Mark Levinson No5805 is designed as a more affordable model – well, by the company's standards, anyway – and has digital-to-analogue conversion built in, along with a USB Type B 'computer audio' input. Delivering 125W per channel, which the company says is quoted conservatively, it sounds decidedly bigger in use. Details at marklevinson.com.

● REVIEW NAIM MU-SO 2

A stereo system in a single box

Not so much updated as completely reinvented, despite the similar looks, the new version of Naim's all-in-one system is an even more attractive buy

Officially called the 'Naim Mu-so 2nd Generation', what is almost inevitably shortened to 'Mu-so 2' may look just like the groundbreaking model it replaces but is actually substantially updated, re-engineered and reinvented, with the aim of delivering even greater flexibility and performance. For that, no one can accuse the Naim engineers of lack of ambition: after all, the original set new standards in its class – well, actually, it invented its class – and set the company on the path of attracting a whole new range of buyers to its brand.

The 2014 launch of Mu-so marked a series of firsts for the Salisbury company. It was its first integrated system, taking the idea of the Naim Uniti models to its logical conclusion by building speakers and amplification into a single housing; it was designed and engineered in the UK but built in China, in huge quantities; and it was sold beyond the usual Naim retailer base, in the likes of Apple stores, John Lewis and even Currys PC World.

Now, with Mu-so 2, the company takes a step upmarket – the original was £995, although discounted below £800 towards the end of its life, but the new one is £1299 – and justifies that with the adoption of its Future Platform, bringing enhanced file format and streaming service compatibility, extra features and a completely revised audio section. That new platform, first seen in the major revision of the Uniti range unveiled late in 2016 and then rolled up to last year's new ND-series network music players, is the result of major development investment in Salisbury, and was designed not only to bring it up to date with current streaming trends but also to futureproof it. So, with all that investment, it makes sense that the company is using it as widely as possible.

What it brings to Mu-so 2 is a much more powerful multicore processor to run the digital signal processing – it has a capacity of 2000 MIPS (million instructions per second), against the original's single-core 150MIPS – meaning that it's now possible to handle audio at up to 384kHz/32-bit as well as DSD files. Spotify Connect, Tidal, Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay 2 are all built in and the Mu-so is Roon-ready, while the Chromecast built in allows audio to be streamed from hundreds



NAIM MU-SO 2

Type Network music system

Price £1299

Inputs 3.5mm stereo analogue, optical digital, USB Type A, HDMI with ARC and CEC

Networking Ethernet, Wi-Fi (IEEE 802.11a/b/g/n/ac)

Streaming Apple AirPlay 2, Bluetooth, Chromecast built in, UPnP, Spotify Connect, TIDAL, Roon Ready, Internet Radio

File formats (depending on input) PCM-based to 384kHz/24-bit, DSD to DSD128

Audio Three-way stereo speakers, actively driven with 450W (6x75W) of amplification

Accessories supplied Remote handset, black speaker grille

Dimensions (WxHxD) 62.8x12.2x26.4cm
naimaudio.com

of compatible apps, including Qobuz, Deezer, TuneIn, SoundCloud and Pandora.

Added to the existing input capability – USB, network, optical digital and 3.5mm analogue – is an HDMI socket with Audio Return Channel capability, allowing an easy way to connect TV sound through the Mu-so 2 and the ability to control the unit through the TV remote, while on the same subject an improved remote handset comes

It will do everything you want and more, is simple to set-up and use, and delivers striking sound for its size and price

with the Naim system. Most users, however, are likely to control the Mu-so 2 via the Naim app on either a tablet or smartphone: this opens up network streaming of music as well as the system's multiroom feature, which is now possible via AirPlay 2, Google Apps or Naim's own system, which allows multiple Mu-so, Uniti or ND-products to be combined wirelessly.

The top-panel main control retains the large volume wheel of the original but now has 15 touch-buttons built in, while new colours are available for the removable/interchangeable grilles: black is standard

but you can buy extra grilles in Terracotta, Olive or Peacock. Within, the Mu-so 2 has a redesigned speaker array, the result of co-operation with Naim's stablemate, Focal, and a larger internal volume for better bass, while the room compensation feature now has a choice of three settings, allowing the system to be used near a wall, near a corner or in free space.

PERFORMANCE

With the exception of those extra features and facilities, using the Mu-so 2 is just like setting up and operating the original. With it connected to the mains and the home network, the rest of the configuration is done in minutes using the Naim app, after which the system is ready to be used. And a system this certainly is, both in terms of capability and performance: those who have referred to the Mu-so models as 'wireless speakers' are some way wide of the mark, as this is actually a complete stereo system in a single box.

That's clear as soon as one listens to the Mu-so 2. Good though the original was, the new model delivers an even more room-filling sound, with a more substantial bass, better clarity and detail, and an enhanced sense of stereo sound stage – which was, in itself, already impressive from a 'one-box' system in the original Mu-so. What one gains in the Mu-so 2 is a better sense of the scale and presence of the sound, as much with solo piano, say, as with full orchestral recordings.

In fact, larger-scale works are surprisingly effective through this system, with plenty of weight and even a good sense of concert-hall ambience where relevant. And from a system this compact – while substantial, the Naim is hardly huge – that is somewhat remarkable. In fact, provided you don't have a huge room to fill and are looking for a system that's neat and stylish, perhaps even to fit on a unit beneath a wall-mounted television, you won't go wrong with the Mu-so 2. It will do everything you want and more, is simple to set-up and use, and delivers striking sound for both its size and its price. Yes, it's more expensive than the model it replaces – and much more expensive than the discount prices at which the original Mu-so was available as it began to approach the end of its life – but what it can do makes it a rather persuasive buy. **G**

● ESSAY

How the Walkman changed the way we listen

By bringing high-quality sound to everyone, Sony's tape Walkman started a revolution in listening that's still echoing today

As hi-fi legends go, 'I had one of the very first Walkman players' is one you'll see just about every time an anniversary comes around. The recent 40th birthday of Sony's trendsetting tape machine has seen no shortage of misty-eyed recollections, and in the light of the recent revival of the tape cassette – yes, really! – it seems pristine early examples of the breed are much sought-after.

Well, if truth be told, if you were one of the very first to have a Sony Walkman, then you were almost certainly a Japanese student in 1979, as the company sent a number of them out and about around the city wearing the player, just to get people talking about it. It was an early example of the use of 'influencers', long before the internet.

In fact, if you're British and you had an original Walkman, you probably actually had a 'Stowaway', as that's what it was called here; it was the 'Soundabout' in America. By the time I got my first Walkman, some time in 1981, the player had already evolved from the recorder-based TPS-L2 and become considerably less clunky – as well as being named Walkman everywhere. The new machine, almost unrecognisable from its forebear, had 'Walkman II' emblazoned across the front.

The WM-2 was a much sleeker machine, in a silver-grey case not much bigger than the cassettes it played, and came complete with a couple of innovative accessories: a plastic holster with a belt-clip to carry it and an add-on battery pack able to hold a couple of heftier 'D' cells to back up the pair of 'AA' batteries inside the player, doing away with music 'range anxiety'. Sony made more than 1.5m units and working ones are still coveted: find one in working order, with accessories – especially the headphones – and packaging, and you can expect to pay several hundred pounds. That's the same kind of money an original TSP-L2 will cost you, if you're lucky – at the time of writing, there are examples for sale from about £250 up to almost £400.

By the standards of some of the on-head exotica on sale today, those headphones supplied – with their orange foam pads – were basic, if very light and comfortable,



Early Walkmans and the new, hi-res NW-WM1Z

but the real revolution was sound quality. I'd dabbled with some hi-fi systems in my teens; this player, though, received in my last year of university, was not only a revelation in terms of sound quality but also saw me through all the angst of long nights of revision before finals. In fact, I can still remember the joy of going up to the roof terrace of the place I was living as night just

The Walkman was a revelation in terms of sound quality and saw me through long nights of revision before finals

began to turn into morning, stretching out on a bench after a solid all-nighter at books and typewriter, and just letting the music flood into my brain in the chill of a summer sunrise. Coat, Walkman, pocket full of tapes: it became a morning ritual in that Easter term. Not only did the little silver Walkman become an object of fascination for other students, with further examples popping up left, right and centre, but it also changed the way we listened: we swapped tapes – or recorded them, allegedly! – and were all able to play music whenever and wherever we liked, and as loud as we liked.

But there was more to it than that. Those original Walkman machines brought a level of communication with the music that seemed almost miraculous at the time, and proved infectious. Certainly to these ears it sounded better – more detailed, dynamic and powerful – through those little earphones than it did on any stereo system I could afford at the time. We became avid consumers of music; and though I had been heavily involved in choirs in my very

early teens and before, it was through listening to tapes on my Walkman that I really became captivated by classical music.

And over the 30+ years since it all started, when Sony co-founder Masaru Ibuka decided he wanted a more compact way to listen to operas on his business trips, the Walkman has become highly influential. Those original machines

didn't do their designer Norio Ohga any harm at all: he ended up as President and Chairman of Sony, retiring in 2003 and remaining Honorary Chairman (and chairman of the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra) until his death in 2011. But his ideas live on, not just in the 400m Walkman machines Sony has sold but through to iPods, iPhones and all manner of portable music-playing devices.

The tape-playing Walkman line ran out almost a decade ago but Sony still has a range of file-based hardware bearing the Walkman name, and now able to play everything from high-resolution music through to network streaming services. These days we have gone from a portable library limited only by how many cassettes you could cram into your pockets to machines that can play many hundreds or even thousands of tracks. The Sony NW-WM1Z player, for example – all of £3000 in its copper casework – can play music up to DSD11.2MHz and has 256GB of storage, thus enabling it to carry up to 1600 hi-res tracks with you wherever you go. It's slimmer than the original TPS-L2 but otherwise not much smaller.

Sitting on my desk as I write this are a number of portable music players: as well as my iPhone and an elderly iPod Touch, I have an Onkyo machine, an Astell&Kern and the truly tiny Shanling M0, not to mention a couple of portable DACs designed to boost the sound of music on the move, including the Chord Electronics Mojo/Poly combination. All owe a debt to that original Walkman idea, and all give me that opportunity to have great music wherever I want. Only one regret: I wish I'd kept that old Sony WM-2. After all, we went through a lot together. **G**

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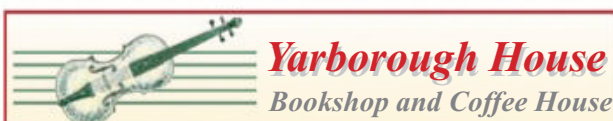
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Sir Colin Davis's Elgar ...

I greatly enjoyed reading your Collection on Elgar's Symphony No 1 (August, page 108). Having gone and listened to the Sir Adrian Boult recording, based on your recommendation, I then went back and listened again to my old favourite that wasn't considered by Geraint Lewis: Sir Colin Davis conducting the Staatskapelle Dresden in a live recording from 1998 released on the Profil label. As good as the Boult recording is, my loyalty remains unchanged. I wonder if it is something to do with the combination of a world class German orchestra that hadn't been exposed much to this music, alongside a very experienced conductor who could guide them on their voyage of discovery? I would recommend the Dresden/Davis combination for those looking for perhaps the freshest, yet also most majestic, recording of this work.

Tom Gillingwater

Gullane, East Lothian

... and another supporter!

Reading Geraint Lewis's review of current recordings of Elgar 1 caused me to listen once again to Sir Adrian Boult's 1976 BBC Proms performance. I agree with his assessment that it is a thrilling version; but is it the most satisfying, the one that you would likely play most often? Sir Colin Davis recorded the work three times, with the BBC SO on RCA, for LSO Live and his finest performance of all with the Staatskapelle Dresden on Profil. It has all the right elements, power, pathos and grandeur. That's the version I will take down from my shelf most frequently.

Barry Bloxham

Taunton, Somerset

Geraint Lewis writes: *I reluctantly put Davis's Dresden recording aside - fine though it is - because in the final analysis I didn't find his grasp of the structure to be firm enough. I remain committed to my Top Choice and will always return to it with awe and gratitude.*

Richter's Elgar No 2

Geraint Lewis mentions Hans Richter's involvement with Elgar's Symphony No 1, but he was also important to Elgar regarding his Symphony No 2. The late Martin Bird tells us in *Hans Himself: Elgar and the Richter Circle* (Elgar Works, 2017)

Letter of the Month

The European film music tradition

Although I was pleased that last month's *Gramophone* devoted space to film music why is this subject so often only discussed from a Hollywood-centric point of view? There is a great tradition of fine European/art house movie composition that is neglected.

Apart from the popular Michel Legrand what about other French New Wave cinema composers like Georges Delerue and Antoine Duhammel? Both wrote music for films made by Truffaut and Godard (most notably *Jules et Jim* and *Pierrot Le Fou*). As for classic Italian cinema of the '60s it often appears to be only represented by Nina Rota's work with Fellini. But there is also the undeservedly forgotten Giovanni Fusco who wrote brilliantly for the iconic films of Antonioni (*L'avventura* and *L'eclisse*) and Alain Resnais – Fusco's chamber music from *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) is in my opinion, masterly.

Bringing things a bit more up to date the Polish composer Zbigniew Preisner contributed enormously to the international success of Kieslowski's *Three Colours* film trilogy in the '90s. And what of Georges Auric and the cinema of Jean Cocteau? Or Erik Nordgren's music for Ingmar Bergman? CDs do exist for these two composers



Georges Delerue (left), with François Truffaut

but when is their music analysed or discussed in serious classical music magazines or ever performed live?

Part of the trouble is that so few foreign, subtitled films (I mean the repertory cinema classics as well as new releases) are ever screened on TV or in cinemas nationwide.

So move over *Star Wars* and *The Godfather*! The Europeans have been writing exciting, melodic and radical film scores for decades that we never hear performed in the UK but if we did our enjoyment of the huge international range of film music would be greatly enhanced.

Alan Price, London

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that in the second theme of the finale, labelled 'Hans himself', 'Elgar reveals not only the noble and dignified character of Richter, but his whole approach to conducting. Put on your favourite recording, beat time with the music as the theme appears, and through your arms you will get an uncanny insight into what Elgar experienced when he heard Richter conduct.' In a letter to Richter in March 1911 in which he refers to the symphony, Elgar writes: 'I hope you may hear it some day - it was meant for you to like.'

Paul Chennell, via email

A fine American symphonist

As a devotee to American classical music, I enjoyed Gerard Schwarz's feature (July, page 18). I'd also like to mention the Missouri-born, Texas-raised Don Gillis (1912-78), NBC producer for Toscanini who also helped found the Symphony of the Air. Besides his Symphony No 5½, 10 symphonies sprung from his pen as a melting pot of Copland and Groucho Marx – 50 per cent touching, 50 per cent smiling – *symphonies du bonheur* I call them.

Yvan Pucelle

Nantes, France

OBITUARIES

Two fine North American singers who worked with Joan Sutherland

SPIRO MALAS

Bass-baritone and actor

Born January 28, 1933

Died June 23, 2019



The Greek-American bass-baritone Spiro Malas, a leading singer with New York City Opera for many years, has died in New York at the age of 86. Born in

Baltimore, Malas began his vocal training at Peabody Conservatory alongside attending and subsequently teaching at Towson State College in Maryland. The young Malas caught the attention of Rosa Ponselle, and made his operatic debut in his hometown in 1959. In 1960, he won both the American Opera Auditions and the Met Council Auditions, and made his New York debut that same year. After sparking the interest of Joan Sutherland and her husband Richard Bonyngé, he was invited on a tour of Australia with the Sutherland-Williamson International Opera Company, the beginning of an extremely rewarding career.

Malas performed in major opera houses throughout Europe, collaborating with many of the world's leading orchestras and some of opera's most distinguished figures including Luciano Pavarotti and Marilyn Horne, and was celebrated not only for his vocal talent but also his acting ability both onstage and onscreen. He was nominated for a Drama Desk Award for his portrayal of Tony Esposito in the 1992 production of *The Most Happy Fella*.

His most notable operatic recordings include Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* ('Malas, rolling his "r"s in a very un-French way, makes a firm-voiced, sympathetic Suipice, an admirable foil in the comic scenes', wrote Edward Greenfield in November 1968) and *L'elisir d'amore*, both with Pavarotti and Sutherland, as well as Rossini's *Semiramide*, all for Decca, and Handel's *Giulio Cesare* with the New York City Opera for RCA.

Outside of performing, Spiro Malas taught at Barnard College and Columbia University, and served on the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music and Curtis Institute of Music. He was also a patron of Delta Omicron International Music Fraternity, an association which aims to promote and encourage musical excellence.

JOSEPH ROULEAU

Bass

Born February 28, 1931

Died July 12, 2019



The French-Canadian bass, who numbered Philip II in Verdi's *Don Carlos* as one of his greatest roles, has died at the age of 90. Born in Matane, Québec,

Rouleau studied at Montreal's Conservatoire with Martial Singher before working with Mario Basiola and Antonio Narducci in Milan. He made his debut as Colline in *La bohème* in New Orleans in 1955 and the following year appeared as Philip II in Montreal. He made his Royal Opera debut as Colline in 1957 and appeared numerous times with the company over the next two decades. In 1960 he appeared alongside Joan Sutherland in Bellini's *La sonnambula*, following that up with collaborations with Sutherland in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Rossini's *Semiramide* (which he recorded for Decca, in a cast also featuring Spiro Malas – see left). Other recordings included Thomas's *Hamlet* (with Sutherland and conducted by Richard Bonyngé), the English-language Berlioz *Les Troyens* recorded live in 1957 at Covent Garden under Rafael Kubelík (Testament) and on both of Sir Colin Davis's sets of Berlioz's *L'enfance du Christ* (Argo and Philips). A BBC recording of Rouleau as Philip II in the French-language version of *Don Carlos* was issued by Opera Rara. ('As the tormented, dictatorial Philippe, Joseph Rouleau also surpasses himself vocally and dramatically, so we are at once angered by his tyrannical ways and saddened by his inner misery', wrote Alan Blyth, 10/06.)

Rouleau made his Metropolitan Opera debut as the Grand Inquisitor in *Don Carlos* under James Levine in 1984. A fine actor, Rouleau's repertoire extended well beyond Italian opera and he was celebrated as Titurel (*Parsifal*) and in the title-role in *Boris Godunov*. In the French repertoire he was a fine Don Quichotte and Méphistopheles in *Faust*.

After he retired from singing, Rouleau devoted himself to teaching, both at the Université du Québec à Montréal and in his own opera workshop which he established with the soprano Colette Boky.

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










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Juliet Stevenson

The actor on the links between music and the spoken word, and how knowing about the lives of composers draws you deeper into their work

My involvement in Lucy Parham's 'I, Clara' came out of 'Beloved Clara', which we've been performing together for some years, and which explores the letters and diaries of Robert and Clara Schumann. These projects, whereby the exploration of composers' lives throws light on their musical creations, are endlessly fascinating – of course, you don't need to know about a composer to appreciate his or her work, but to listen to a Robert Schumann piece having learned it was the last piece he wrote before being committed to an asylum allows you to be drawn into his music through an added lens. Lucy and I started to feel more and more strongly that, particularly with this year being the bicentenary of Clara's birth, she should be celebrated on her own terms – as a composer and a pianist, but also as a wife and a mother.

There are so many women across the arts who are chronically buried or underestimated, and I'm fascinated in rescuing them. I'm interested in the classical canon, but only if it relates to now. We like to talk about us being the first generation of women who've had to juggle things, but Clara had to do it all. She had eight children, she was teaching and performing, and she composed. I have to be honest and say that Robert's music reaches me deeper, but look, she had no role models when it came to female composers. Her letters reveal how she censored herself and was censored by others, how she didn't allow herself to practise her craft fully because her responsibility was to prioritise her husband's talent and look after their children. 'Marriage kills the creative instinct,' she wrote. If you look at what she had to overcome to be a composer, that marks her out. It's a measure of her talent that she was driven to do it at all.

I adore working with Lucy. To sit beside her at the piano, to see her hands on the keyboard, is such a privilege. Hers is a physical relationship with the music – what it costs her is astonishing. When you're up close, you see the sweat, the muscle power – she channels everything through the music. I've always loved working with musicians. I get a great thrill when I'm on stage with an orchestra – I love being the spoken voice inside an orchestral expression, and I love the combination of instruments and the spoken voice. I have long been obsessed with the rhythm of languages, which can contain or communicate as much as the literal sense of the words. All these factors – the heartbeat, the breath, the senses, the workings of the mind – fuse together to create rhythms which speak of an internal life. And this is what the spoken word and music have in common.

I'm the youngest of three, and for some reason my parents decided I was the musical one so I had to learn the piano from the age of six. A few years later, we were living in Malta




THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Beethoven Spring Sonata

Yehudi Menuhin *vn* **Wilhelm Kempff** *pf* (DG)

When my dad was dying and we were nursing him, we played this recording a lot. The music has a lightness of touch, but it's also deeply profound.

because my dad, who was extremely musical, was in the army and stationed there. We were at home and my dad was accompanying a clarinettist. Out of the sitting room came the sound of a clarinet playing what I now know was the slow movement of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. I remember it like yesterday – I was frozen, I couldn't move. After that, I told my parents I wanted to learn the clarinet, but my dad told me I had to play the oboe instead. I accepted it and was grateful to him (he'd always wanted to play the oboe but never had the chance); after the first few months, I absolutely loved it and even now, when I hear the oboe in the middle of an orchestral sound, it still makes me shiver. I still have my oboe, but I don't play it, it's too depressing – the embouchure muscles aren't there now. I do sit down at the piano though – my dad's baby grand lives in our sitting room.

The speed of life has driven out music, in some respects. I'm on the run all the time, so I listen to less classical music than I used to. I might listen in the car, but my preference would be for contemporary vocal music. I struggle with opera though, particularly anything written before Britten. The music might be magnificent but that's not enough. I think Britten did for opera what Sondheim did for musical theatre; he radically reinvented the form, he infused it with a psychological intelligence – which is surely what any actor is looking for. 

For information about future performance dates and venues relating to 'I, Clara', visit lucyparham.com



香港中樂團

HONG KONG CHINESE ORCHESTRA

藝術總監：閻惠昌

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: YAN HUICHANG

THE FOURTH 第四屆國際中樂指揮大賽 INTERNATIONAL CONDUCTING COMPETITION FOR CHINESE MUSIC

OPENS FOR NON-ETHNIC CHINESE CONDUCTORS

The Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (HKCO) created a platform for young conducting talents by initiating and organizing The First Hong Kong International Conducting Competition for Chinese Music in 2011. It was a resounding success and won worldwide acclaim, with the support of professional orchestras, music institutes and other organizations around the world and renowned for being 'a milestone in the development of Chinese orchestral music'. Throughout the years, entries from all over the world have been received, including Hong Kong, America, Austria, mainland China, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Poland, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, UK and Ukraine etc.

In 2020, the HKCO will join with The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in organizing the fourth edition of the Competition. Contestants should have a broad vision, intellectual accomplishments, and resourceful creativity to be an impetus to an orchestra for continual growth and development. Non-ethnic Chinese conductors around the world are encouraged to participate in order to strengthen the elite forces that would make Chinese music shine on the international stage.

Eligibility

- The Participant must be born on or after 1 January, 1975, and
- The Participant must have experience in conducting an orchestra, or be currently studying Conducting as a major in a conservatory of music

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- Outstanding Young Conductor of Hong Kong
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Dates of Competition:

- First Round Nov 2019 - Jan 2020 (Hong Kong)
- Second Round 26-29 June 2020 (Hong Kong)
- Semi-final Competition 1-2 July 2020 (Hong Kong)
- Final Competition Concert 4 July 2020 (Hong Kong)



Details:

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